THEMOS DEMETRIOU

100 YEARS AFTER

In Lenin's footsteps a century after the Russian Revolution

The texts of 2010

EDITIONS SOSIALISTIKI EKFRASI

Themos Demetriou

100 YEARS AFTER

In Lenin's footsteps a century after the Russian Revolution

The texts of 2010

*Printed by **Typografart***
ISBN 000-0000-0000-0-0
EDITIONS SOSIALISTIKI EKFRASI
Nicosia 2012

*In memory of **Nicos Sarris** who spent his life searching for a better world.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

In January 2010 a new internal crisis erupted in the ranks of the *International Marxist Tendency* (IMT). Very quickly the crisis led to a split with many important cadres from various countries and in some cases whole national sections leaving the organization. Central in the crisis was the implementation of Democratic Centralism by the leadership of the Organisation and other disagreements on political issues.

IMT was in turn itself a split from the *Committee for a Workers' International* (CWI). The Left Wing was for a short period in the '80s associated with CWI and had the agonising experience of the split in the early '90s. After working for a short period with the IMT the Left Wing distanced itself, disappointed with the behaviour of the new leadership.

For almost twenty years we watched the work of various Marxist groups to move from failure to failure, from split to split, displaying almost total lack of serious political analysis and even less creative organizational intervention in society. So, when we we were approached for participation in a discussion among the cadres that left the IMT in search of a common position, we were highly skeptical. We decided

to take part in the discussion with no commitment or obligation towards anybody.

The discussion proved a much more complicated process than its organisers expected. The wide spectrum of opinions among the discussants was creating problems and bitterness; some were eager to create a new organisation, more or less in the old tradition. In general, however, the climate of the discussion was good and important documents were produced that in some cases leave behind them the bad tradition of dogmatic insistence on obsolete structures and stale recipies. It was in this context that the documents in this volume were written. These documents provide a general idea of the thinking of the Left wing in the matters that are discussed in them.

Most of the documents are replies to ones written by people taking part in the discussion and are here presented in their original form. They were written by the author and given to the member of the Left Wing who expressed their willingness to read them and make their comments before they take their final form. In some cases these comments proved very important and improved the text substantially.

A query that might arise is the wisdom of presenting replies to documents not presented themselves. However, the replies were not

written as polemics and they are not meant to negate the positions of the writer of the original documents. Additionally, in the replies long excerpts from the original documents are presented to give a fair idea of the author's viewpoint. For those interested in seeing the original documents they can be found in the webside http://tanit.co and on the forum http://forum.tanit.co

Finally, a 1992 Perspectives document that proved an important milestone in the thinking of the Left Wing is included in this volume. We think that it complements the thinking presented in the rest of the documents. Despite its considerable age, it is a sample of the approach that nearly twenty years later is applied in the discussion documents. The fact that som of the view that are expressed in it are obsolete only reinforces the basic position expressed elsewhere: an action document is of necessity limited by the conditions in which it is written and cannot be valid everywhere and forever.

I wish to express my gratitude to the comrades of the Left Wing who read again the documents and contributed to the correction and improvement of their presentation. I would like to believe that the final result expresses our common approach to the matters it deals with. Nevertheless, for any

errors, omissions or analytical mistakes the responsibility is completely my own.

Special thanks to Soteris Vlachos who undertook the difficult task of translation: for the discussion documents into Greek from the original English texts for the Greek edition of the book, and the 1972 document into English from the original Greek text for the present volume.

Themos Demetriou
August 2012

TEXT ONE



WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

JeanLieven' lead-off in Athens deals with a number of issues that are relevant to the title question. As I was not present in Athens, I am not in a position to judge whether it served fully the needs of the conference or not. However, as a definitive document answering that question, should be examined critically and it is in this spirit that the present reply was written.

My main criticism of the document is that it verges on the Utopian approach to socialism. This is probably inevitable, imposed by the question itself. It has always been tempting to try to describe the future society we are fighting for, to describe the perfect society where free men and women will interact harmoniously and live in a state of permanent

bliss. Utopias in fact have had an important contribution to make in the development of ideas concerning the structure of society. From the *Republic* of Plato to the *Utopia* of Thomas More, from Fourier's *Phalansteres* to Huxley's *Island*, or in William Morris' *News from Nowhere*, we have such a yearning of a future vision. However much these texts contributed to the understanding of social structures, they had no direct influence in the way history developed. I am not suggesting that Jean Liviens is describing another Utopia in that tradition. Nevertheless, in his attempt to answer the question *What is Socialism?*he seems approach socialism as a specific form of social organisation to be designed and implemented by revolutionaries.

JL introduces his thesis with the description of the development of Wikipedia and Linux as examples of non-capitalist forms of production. Of course, this is not a new phenomenon, as the author seems to imply. Bernard Shaw has pointed out that 'communist' forms of production can be found within the capitalist system. In his *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* he sites roads as such an example. In fact, Shaw's choice is probably more relevant in this discussion than Wikipedia or Linux, in the sense that in roads

we have a conscious decision by society to offer freely to its citizens their use.[1] In contrast, Wikipedia is a project based on volunteers and donations. Its amazing success does show that people are willing to work just for the joy of it rather than necessarily requiring material rewards to do so. It is however not much different than what groups of people have been always doing: study circles, book societies, charities, sports clubs etc. have always based their existence on voluntary work. The difference of course is the sheer size to which Wikipedia managed to grow.

I am not going to analyse at length the somewhat different case of Linux or the significance of the behavioural experiments JL describes. What is important is that all those cases give the lie to the simplistic capitalist assumption that material self-interest is the only drive in human nature. Once basic needs are satisfied, other factors come into play that complicate things. To put it in another way, *“It is not the consciousness of men that deter-*

---

[1] Some roads have at times been handed over to private companies to construct in exchange for allowing them to collect tolls from the users, but this is still the exception. Some goods seem somehow to defy capitalist norms since the early days of the system.

mines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness". The point here is that modern capitalism is creating conditions that create a different social reality that does not any more correspond to the traditional capitalist norms. This reality creates the conditions for the development of a different consciousness, one that is compatible with a socialist society.

I could be wrong, but it seems to me that JL reverses the argument. He seems to take 'human nature' as something fixed, with the added twist that, as the experiments he describes show, it is compatible with socialist values. If this is what his argument is, it is Utopian reasoning. What we should be looking for is not 'socialist' traits in human nature but processes within capitalism that exhaust its possibilities and render existing relations among human beings obsolete.

A social system is in essence a set of relationships among human beings. More precisely, *power relationships.* Ownership of capital is important not so much because it provides its owners a disproportionate amount of goods but because it enables them to exert power over the non-owners, the proletariat. This is why the question of ownership of the means of production is probably the most important issue in revolutionary politics. In

fact capitalism has developed probably all the tools and methods for social production within the existing forms and structures of business.As JL points out, any large enterprise worth its name, has moved beyond the control of its owners; it is run by managers who plan its activities in much the same way that a business in a socialist society would be run. The crucial difference lies in the objectives these managers try to achieve. In a capitalist context, they seek to maximise profits for the owners (although even this is being blurred as companies grow to monstrous proportions). In a socialist society these same managers could work as efficiently with different objectives: optimise the provision of goods required by society. They would use the same theoretical tools, the same methods but in a different context. They would probably be even more efficient since there will be no conflict between production of goods and production of profit.

Let me give some examples of this conflict, of the irrationality of today's capitalism. In the pre-war years an oligopoly was already developing in the light bulb manufacturing industry. An agreement between the manufacturing companies secured high prices and production levels. At one stage one of the companies put to the market a light bulb that features double the lifespan of the usual

bulbs. Philips promptly complained that such an action would decrease sales to the



detriment of all the producers. What was 'profitable' for the company was manifestly wasteful for society.

The next case I want to mention is the case of a well known painkiller. Its success was assured by an aggressive advertising campaign whose costs raised the selling price to a few dollars while the production cost was not more than a few cents. Of course generic products of the same nature were not allowed to be produced for years, meaning that people were forced to buy the product at a price of a hundred or so times more than they needed to. This is still the case for most of today's medicines. Their exorbitant prices are not in correspondence with their production costs, they are expensive simply because, under capitalism, the pharmaceutical companies have to recoup their research costs, thus denying the world of life saving cheap medicines in order to make profits.

A similar picture is seen in the music industry.As piracy has shown, one could have

best quality music, films or software for the price of a blank CD or DVD. The inability of capitalism to provide a rational way of distributing music while at the same time securing the rights of artists and, most importantly, record companies,



has led the producers of CD and DVD players to spend years of research, costing billions of dollars, to introduce technology in their gadgets that prevents copying discs. Most of this technology reduces at the same time the quality of music. The only thing they succeeded was to push piracy to the internet and the development of the new technology of MP3s, more or less destroying the traditional music industry based on CD and DVDs. The piracy war is now raging on the Internet with no solution on the horizon.

Another scandal is the software industry. Having cheap software for everybody is the easiest thing these days. Today's companies have to buy software costing thousands of euros, and some of them have to buy this software several times over, when they could get it for free. Again, it is the basic research cost that has to be recouped that drives up the

price. Consequently, huge amounts of money are spent on research to combat piracy, further reducing the overall efficiency of the capitalist mode of production.

The point I am trying to make is that we don't have to invent the wheel again. All these structures are there for the taking. The basic issue remains the taking over of ownership of the means of production. By changing owners, all these companies can switch from producing for the sake of profit to producing for the sake of the common good. A change in ownership inverts the power relationships, makes planning possible. Planning not in the sense of detailed directives on every aspect of production, but planning of a general nature that directs production towards the real needs of society. The good old slogan of nationalising the commanding heights of the economy is a very potent one and can still serve us well. The problem with it was that it became stylised, it was used as a ritualistic chant rather than as a vibrant and living demand, adjusted and streamlined for specific needs of specific times.

Coming back to the original question, *what is Socialism*? The simplest answer I think would be the classic answer: public ownership of the

means of production[2]. Despite the fact that it has been explained *ad nauseam* that this does not mean the nationalisation of every little business around, but refers only to the critical sectors of the economy, the banks, the big monopolies etc. the impression persists that socialist are after taking over everything, from the big banks to the neighbourhood grocer. Of course, that would not only be a bad idea politically, it would be economic suicide. Examples of analogous attempts are the cases of *War Communism* attempted after the Russian Revolution and later the forced collectivisation of the Russian countryside by *Stalin. The first forced the Bolsheviks to* resort to increasingly repressive policies in order to sustain it, until they were forced to ease up the situation with the introduction of NEP, a manifest retreat in the face of peasant resistance. The second was achieved by Stalin by means of brutal repression and at the cost

[2]The proposal for public ownership through the distribution of shares to the workers/public that I understand has been proposed in Athens, in addition to its doubtful feasibility, does not transfer power to society. On the contrary, as with the distribution of land to the peasants, it just starts the same shit all over again by creating novice capitalists. In its modified form, of restricted rights of selling, it is self-negating.

of the collapse of agricultural production in the Soviet Union.

This still requires some qualifications. A lot has been made of the fact that nationalisations under capitalism do not equal socialism. It is however misleading to equate the nationalisation of some sectors, while the key ones remain in the hands of private property, with socialism. As long as the key sectors of the economy remain private, the power still is in the hands of the capitalists. This does not mean that nationalising secondary sectors is unimportant. It means though, that not until the control of the whole economy, and in today's world, world economy, is in the hands of society, can we speak of a socialist reality.

The second qualification relates to the Stalinist experience. If public ownership of the means of production means socialism, was the Soviet Union under Stalin socialist? The short answer to that is that the brutal repression needed to sustain the system is proof enough that 'the public' had no control over what it nominally 'owned', making the *socialist* label probably inappropriate for the system of the Soviet Union. The longer one would have to deal with the economic backwardness of Russia at the time of revolution and the impossibility of *socialism in*

one country. A 'socialist' country in a capitalist world would be a society under siege, making it a society *in transition* rather than a socialist one. Sooner or later, it would have either to impose its system on the world, ending the state of siege and making possible the democratic control of the means of production and true socialism, or revert to capitalism.

However, these qualifications do not make necessary the description of 'our' socialist Utopia. As has been mentioned above, socialist methods are lurking underneath most of today's capitalist bastions. Few things need be changed. Once power is taken away from the capitalists the economy will be mostly run by the same methods but to different ends. The removal of the pursuit of profit as the main objective, far from disrupting the economy will in fact make production much more rational andefficient.

In this context, it is worth narrating another weird story of modern capitalism. The unification of Germany was in fact a takeover of East Germany by the West. The totality of West German laws and market practices were imposed overnight in a society run by central planning. One of the first tasks the new rulers had to perform was the break-up of the huge public enterprises. Most of them were old,

with obsolete machinery and technology and all they did was to bankrupt them and provide the money to close them down. In the energy sector, however, they were faced with a different problem. Under the central planning of the old state production and distribution of electricity were managed separately, with the national grid joined at various points to the wider grid of Eastern Europe. This contrasted with the West German practice of integrated production and distribution under common management. The West German model was, of course, imposed. Some twenty years later, western thinking on production and distribution of electricity changed. The new realities of the diversification of energy sources, of trans-national grids and all European integration of energy distribution led to the separation of production from distribution of electricity. Despite the fact that this separation was imposed as part of the privatisation of electricity in most countries, it was perfectly in line with the central planning philosophy of the old East German state.

Finally, a few words on the question of the State. In Marxist literature the State is not something as dilute as JL tries to define it. It is pointless to try to evade the impact of ‘smashing the bourgeois State’ by including in the definition of the State hospitals, the welfare state etc. making the ‘smashing’

unnecessary. Nay, it is both misleading and dangerous. In Marxist terms, the State is an instrument of suppression, an instrument in the hands of the ruling class in order to perpetuate its rule. It is *in the final analysis, armed bodies of men.* It is this state that has to be 'smashed' and replaced by the proletariat's own 'State', its own *armed bodies of men.* It is the army and the police and the judiciary and, in all probability, all the paraphernalia of parliamentary democracy that are in opposition to the revolutionary proletariat. Traditional Marxist wisdom has it that all these have to go and new forms found that will corres-



pond to the new ruling class, the proletariat, for as long as its rule is required. How quickly and how efficiently and through what procedures this dismantling will take place,

can be discussed. My feeling is that all these trappings of bourgeois society have to be replaced in the first period of revolution – otherwise they will come back to reclaim power for the bourgeoisie.

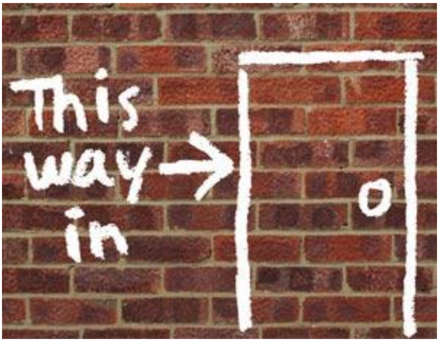
Of course, we don't need to place these issues in the forefront of our programme. It is stupid to put issues of the future in today's work. These matters cannot be appreciated by people not schooled in the ideas of Marxism. People tend to cross bridges when they reach them, not before. Unless we convince people that we are sincere in fighting *their* battles, the ones they are engaged in and understand, they will shut us off and isolate us.

On the other hand we don't hide our analysis either. Although we don't insist to persuade people of the need to 'smash the bourgeois state', we tell them honestly that our analysis makes us believe that at some stage there will be a showdown in which these things have to be faced. We don't need to convince them *now* but we have to make sure that our analysis is open for everybody to see.[3]

---

[3]This may not be possible in cases of repressive regimes. In such situations, what is said and what is not said should take into account the realities on the ground.

TEXT TWO



MORE ON THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMME

Harry Rattner's intervention on the question of the transitional programme has in many ways shed new light on what is lacking in the programmatic arsenal of the left. While there is no end to political analyses and propaganda pieces the left has in general failed to provide a credible concrete programme that would show the way out of the capitalist impasse. While such a situation would probably be understandable in times of a booming economy, it is frustrating in today's world of utter confusion among the ranks of capitalist economic thinkers and vicious austerity measures by disoriented governments, including social democratic ones.

What has gone wrong? If we look at the kind of literature the vast majority of self-styled

revolutionary groups have been producing in the last half century, we can hardly find any serious criticism of capitalism. Most of them carry on reproducing classic material which is increasingly irrelevant in today's fast changing world. The more vulgar manifestation of this kind of intellectual laziness can be seen in the ready answer to any problem arising from the workings of capitalism: 'only socialism can provide the answer'. Probably true, but inadequate.

Trotsky's transitional programme has also been badly misused by his epigones. In contrast to his dialectical approach of tying



his analysis and programme to the objective situation and the needs of current revolutionary work, they use his writings as the holy scriptures of the new religion, the eternal truth of revolutionary wisdom. Unable to understand that the objective situation had drastically changed after the war, they continued to use Trotsky's analysis and programme that was not any more relevant in the new conditions of a rejuvenated capitalism.

What was Trotsky's method? His analysis of the thirties led him to the conclusion that capitalism was going through its final stages of disintegration, its 'death agony'. One can question the validity of his analysis, but he had ample justification for it. The great crash of 1929 had ushered in the worst period of depression in the history of capitalism, Mussolini and Hitler were in power and the war was approaching fast. The dilemma of *Socialism or barbarity* was very real. In any case, he was vindicated by the outbreak and the viciousness of the Second World War.

Trotsky had to provide a platform for revolutionaries to work with. Stalinism had proved to be a spent force as far as the revolution was concerned and Social Democracy was incapable of either understanding the situation or putting up a fight against the forces of reaction. Worse, both Stalinism and Social Democracy were collaborating with those responsible for the predicament of the world, the bourgeoisie. The launch of the Fourth International can only be viewed in this context: As an attempt to rally the forces of revolution around his small group of followers in order to transform it into a world-changing force.

The same context should be born in mind when we look at the *Transitional Programme*.

It is nothing more and nothing less than an instrument for rallying the working class to the ranks of revolution. In this sense, it does not offer a lifeline to capitalism. On the contrary, it exposes its inability to implement simple measures to get society out of its dire straights. On the other hand, such a programme cannot be based on lies, cannot be just promises in order to gain the support of the class, later to be abandoned. Such tactics can sometimes work in bourgeois electoral campaigns but are useless in revolutionary work. Workers are not morons to be lured to revolution, they are quite capable of understanding the intentions of would-be leaders and act accordingly. The most usual reason for the isolation of 'revolutionary' grouplets, is this lack of respect on their part for the intelligence of the working class.

We could discuss endlessly whether the specific programmatic proposals of Trotsky's *Transitional Programme* were the correct ones at the time, whether he judged correctly the mood of the working class and the possibilities of rallying it to the revolutionary project. What is important though is that they probably have the same relevance today as the Communist Manifesto's later chapters. An active revolutionary is not in the business of writing academic treatises that transcend current situations. He has to analyse the

current situation, explain its dynamics and propose measures to deal with it. These measures are necessarily specific, limited in their applicability, both in time and space. Some of these measures could be relevant in different times, others not. What *is* relevant is the logic behind them, the method that let to them.

The first step in the process of formulating a programme is the analysis of the present epoch. We cannot intervene in the political and social processes unless we understand the objective situation, unless we understand the dynamics of these processes. It is all too tempting to forgo this step and try to form a programme based on a general impression of the needs of the time. This is what the left has been doing most of the time. The result was stilted programmes of an empirical nature.

Marx and Engels pioneered this analysis in dealing with nineteenth century capitalism and proposing specific mechanisms through which the system developed the productive forces. They showed that the system was not stable but had to go through cycles of boom and crises. Their analysis showed also the mechanisms through which capitalism created the proletariat and the conditions for the creation of proletarian consciousness leading

to social revolution. How capitalism was *creating its own gravediggers.*

Work for the creation and development of the Second International was based on this analysis. Marx and Engels were not expecting an immediate collapse of capitalism on the basis of their economic analysis of the system. Their prediction was a long term one, based on the inherent trends in the workings of capitalism. They realised that revolutions, as the work of men, had little chance of success as long as capitalism could develop the means of production, as long as it could overcome its crises and set off new periods of development. Nevertheless, their analysis led them to argue that capitalist crises would get deeper and deeper until the working class would be strong enough to overthrow it and establish its own dominance.

This is not to say that they were expecting that the world would be capitalist a century or more later. Their timescale was probably measured in decades rather than years, but certainly not centuries. The system they described was competitive capitalism, with the accumulation of capital leading to bigger and bigger enterprises, ending with the creation of monopolies, the negation of the driving force of capitalism itself, competition. Capitalism, within the framework of late nineteenth and

early twentieth century, probably exhausted itself as shown by the outbreak of the First World War. Had the leaders of Social Democracy stuck to their guns and not abandoned internationalism, social revolution and not war would probably be the result.

Lenin's analysis of these processes is to be found in *Imperialism, the highest stage of Capitalism*. As the title announces, Lenin considered *Imperialism* to be the result of the exhaustion of the possibilities of *Capitalism,*



which meant that social revolution was the only way out. The War did lead to revolution in Russia, but not elsewhere. The rearrangement of the power balance between the imperialist countries did give a stay of execution to capitalism, but not for long.

Barely two decades after the most brutal slaughter in the history of mankind had passed when the even more savage brutality of the Second World War was to take place.

The end of the Second World War and the years that followed saw Eastern Europe and China abandon Capitalism. World Capitalism was badly wounded but, despite the predictions of revolutionary groupings, did not die. On the contrary, for decades was going from strength to strength. Its economy was growing at a respectable rate and its crises were becoming just hiccups in an otherwise unfettered development. Its only rival, the Soviet Union, after a short period of huge growth rates and optimism about catching up with the West, was again falling behind in both economic and social terms.

It was not until the seventies that any serious economic problems started to emerge. And it was not until 2008 that the last illusions about the 'end of history' were exposed. Again, it is clear that this is not Lenin's timetable for revolution. Clearly, Lenin's 'last stage of Capitalism' was not quite that. One has to stretch his logic too much to argue that Imperialism, as presented in his analysis, is indeed the last stage of Capitalism, to argue that it is just surviving today waiting for its overthrow.

So, what happened? Is there a ‘new stage’ of capitalism? I would argue that Lenin’s assessment is based on the limits he saw in capitalism organised in the form of national states. The exhaustion of the possibilities of capitalist development within national borders meant that national bourgeoisies attempted to expand internationally. In this attempt, they came up against each other’s interests that at some stage led them to crises and war. What saved international capitalism after the Second World War was the vast expansion of international trade, the removal of tariffs and the successful regulation of economic relations among nations. And this was made possible by the one most important result of the War: the unquestioned dominance of the USA in the capitalist world.

As far as I know, there has been no adequate analysis of the workings of capitalism since the war by the left. Such an analysis is crucial in order to chart our plans and our actions. My feeling is that modern capitalism in no longer confined within nation-states, it has truly become international. Of course there are still fetters on production due to the existence of national borders, of course there are conflicts and clashes between capitalist nations. However, these conflicts are resolved not through wars but through, in the final analysis, the arbitration of the USA. The only

real thread to American dominance did not come from the traditional imperialist states or the world's strong economies but by Stalinist or 'rogue' states.

It is no accident that despite the almost continuous presence of warfare in the world, not once did warfare was even considered between two major capitalist countries. On the other hand, war was too easily resorted to against weak states that refused to be absolutely submissive to American wishes. One can understand why the majority of the left considered the colonial revolution as the only game in town, why they even equated *revolution* with bourgeois bonapartist regimes in the third world. By the same token, one can understand why Stalinism, despite its horrors and economic impasse, continued to exert such an alluring influence on the exploited classes and the world proletariat. Of course this displaced emphasis could only yield limited results which in any case evaporated with a vengeance when Stalinism collapsed.

The above is not just an academic exercise. It has direct bearing on the organizational structures and programmatic policies of the left. Having a perspective of imminent revolution, something probably correct in the period before and just after the war, led to ultra left programmes and rigid structures

which isolated revolutionaries from the workers. On the contrary, Social Democracy and Stalinism, who for their own reasons had no revolutionary agenda, could provide convincing programmes of reform or stagism to attract people to their view of a better tomorrow.

Ted Grand, almost by accident, hit on the correct strategy when he transformed the short term tactic of *entrism* into a long term policy. The success of *The Militant* in Britain is a testimony to that. It is a pity that he didn't go all the way and abandon the term altogether. Marxists need not see themselves as a foreign body inside the mass worker's parties. They should see themselves and behave as an integral part of the working class and its organizations. This does not mean that they should hide their ideas, or that they should not have their organization. But they should not cut themselves apart into a microcosm of their own, where their ideas are only understood by the initiated. A 'reality check' in the form of mass political action is needed in order to avoid losing contact with the consciousness of the working class.

Thus, the transitional programme should be developed with the perspective of turning the mass party or parties of the working class into revolutionary organizations in mind. This

means that we do not antagonize the party but we strive to express our ideas about the correct policies in order to convince the membership of our correctness. Whatever our differences with the leadership, we respect them as the elected representatives of the membership and work with them, not against them. We do not refrain from criticizing them but the aim of our criticism is to correct the policies of the party, either by a change in the position of the leadership or by a leadership change. This is not based on a supposed formal correctness and has nothing to do with whether we believe that the leaders are capable of changing course. If we cannot succeed either in changing policy or changing leadership, it probably means that the workers, or at least the workers in the party, are not yet ready to accept our ideas and they will not follow us if we cause a split.



The practical consequence of the above reasoning is that we can only judge the correctness of our actions in terms of success. The problem is that we can do that with certainty only after our action. When we move into action we are basing ourselves on our

analysis of the situation and our estimate of the outcome. The better our analysis and the more accurate our predictions are, the better our results will be. Of course we should on the one hand be careful not to force prematurely our chances and precipitate a defeat and, on the other, to avoid being too timid and miss important opportunities. We should be prepared to take risks; otherwise, we shall never move forward in any useful way.

Most of the Trotskyist groups have followed an ultra-left course, preaching revolution and isolating themselves from the workers. Some of them at some stage realized that a proletarian revolution was not coming any time soon and veered into opportunist policies. Lambertite *deep entrism* and Pabloite accommodation of anti-imperialist bourgeois bonapartist leaders are probably such examples. However, today it seems that the danger is not so much that of predicting revolution when there is none in the horizon, or that of too much accommodation with non-revolutionary reality. The greater danger lies in not recognizing the sea change after the 2008 collapse of capitalist economy. For the first time since the war, we can probably truly talk of the exhaustion of the possibilities of world capitalism. We are probably entering an

era of ongoing crisis, we may once more be witnessing capitalism's *death agony.*

This does not mean that we should panic and act hastily. On the contrary, it means that only now capitalism is presenting its realities to the modern working class, it is only now that it is once more creating the conditions for the formation of its own gravediggers. This is a huge opportunity for Marxists. We should develop our policies in step with the development of the consciousness of the working class; we should develop our forces in step with the development of the mass organizations of the working class. We should always bear in mind that, no matter how urgent our tasks seem, we should make sure that we give proper thought to what we do.

What then should the philosophy of our *Transitional Programme* be? For one, it should be based on the present realities, both the wider social and economic ones and the organizational realities of the worker's organizations. Within the context of the political climate described above, this should not prove too difficult. Policies such as the nationalization of the banks were catapulted by the crisis of 2008 from the fairyland of socialist utopia into the mainstream of economic thought, both socialist and capitalist. Such blurring of policies will make

increasingly possible the proposal and defense of programmes that lead to the implementation of socialist measures, programmes that will be understood and supported by the workers, programmes that will rally around them the forces of revolution. The cleavage between reform and revolution will continue to close as reforms become increasingly impossible for capitalism to offer. More and more, demands for reforms will be equivalent to asking for revolution. The point is not to forget that and prepare accordingly.

29 November 2010

TEXT THREE



THE CI AND THE FORMATION OF COMMUNIST PARTIES

Pat Byrne has produced a very informative paper on the policies of the Third International. As a resource for the discussion on the subject of work in the mass organisations will prove invaluable, and every participant should read it with open mind and assimilate the lessons from the experience it describes.

Of greatest interest is the narrative on the mess in the Italian and the German Socialist Parties. Poor information, lack of patience, reliance on cadres of questionable caliber are seen to be the hallmarks of the behaviour of the Third International certainly in Italy and probably in both cases. The result was the virtual handing over of the working class to reformism and quite probably a missed opportunity for the prevention of the ascent of

Mussolini and later, of course, Hitler. In this respect, the work of Pat Byrne is enlightening and he convincingly shows the pitfalls of the lack of sensitivity on the part of the leadership, especially international leadership towards the national leaders.

Pat Byrne also makes the important observation of the significance of the retention of tradition, in the form of the name of the Party. We have time and again seen the attachment of the working class to their parties and their names. They are the flag they trust, they are the symbol of their unity. Any thread to their parties is seen as undermining that unity, as a threat to themselves.

It is tempting to read in this behaviour of the Third International the embryo of later behaviourduring the Stalinist years and today's behaviour of the various sect leaderships. In one sense, this is understandable. We should however be careful. These later leaderships use the decisions and resolutions of the Third International as a justification of their behaviour, they copy the rigid directives and the dubious procedures it followed. But there is an abyss of difference between the way the Third International was working and the way Stalinist and sect leaderships do. Unfortunately, Pat Byrne's analysis fails to touch on the subject and can

thus lead to the dismissal of the Third International as an authoritarian organization with sectarian attitudes and questionable revolutionary credentials. In effect, the work of Pat Byrne comes close to seeing the authoritarian behaviour of Stalinist and sect leaderships as the continuation of the methods of the Third International.

Pat Byrne writes:

> Initially, because of the massive radicalisation in the 1920s and the prestige and resources of revolutionary Russia, some of the new communist parties gained a large following often through splits from the main social democratic parties or even in some cases by winning a majority of the mass parties to their banner. However, the disadvantages of such a model appeared almost from the moment of its inception. By separating the most left-wing elements of the labour movement away from the mainstream of working class opinion, sectarianism showed itself in almost all the Communist Parties. This was not helped by the initial analysis of the Communist International which incorrectly assumed that social democracy and its leadership had lost all credibility with the workers. Lenin had held this position since shortly after the outbreak of the war. He was being entirely consistent when at the launch of the new International in 1919 he confidently asserted that:

> *"When the war began in 1914, which for four years has drenched the earth with blood, a war between capitalists for the division of profits, for power over small and weak nations, these socialists passed over to the side of their governments. They betrayed the workers, they helped drag out the slaughter, they became enemies of socialism, they passed over to the side of the capitalists.* ***The masses of the workers have turned away from these traitors to socialism. All over the world there was a turn towards the revolutionary struggle.****" (my emphasis in bold – ed)*

Who Was Blamed for the War? There were several serious problems with Lenin's analysis. First of all, it badly misjudged the post-war mood of the workers in the West. Yes, they had become increasingly fed up with war, but in the absence of an effective peace campaign (another story) large sections of workers supported the conflict even until the end. This was especially true in those countries on the "winning side" such as Britain. To prove the point, within a month of the war's end a British General Election brought down the Liberals from power only to be replaced by the more right-wing Conservatives who achieved a massive majority. Support for the war was even greater in those countries such as Belgium and France which felt they were defending their homeland against German invasion.

This is a misunderstanding of Lenin's analysis. The mood of the workers is not a static, fixed and objective condition to be judged by a measuring instrument like an election or a poll. As I understand it, Lenin is assessing existing *possibilities* for revolution, he is trying to formulate policies that would promote revolution based on these possibilities. What he is saying is that the objective situation is such that the workers could be won to revolutionary policies because they have seen the betrayal of Social Democracy, because they are fed up with the war. In all probability he was right. In Russia, where there was a decisive revolutionary leadership, and here is the full force of the point made in Byrne's document that the Bolsheviks were not a small sect, this came to fruition. Similar processes in Germany, Hungary, Britain and later Spain, show that Lenin's assessment was not all that off the mark.

What is important though, is that the specific form of organization for the parties of the Third International, effectively imposed by Lenin and the Russians, was the chosen path in the specific conditions of the, as they saw it, ongoing World Revolution. They were not proposing a long term policy for building a revolutionary party, they were rallying revolutionary forces in a life and death battle for the survival and expansion of the Russian

Revolution. Had this policy succeeded in just one more country, especially if that was Germany or Britain, history would have taken a radically different course.

Of course one could point at the lack of success in this direction as evidence that shows that Lenin's analysis was wrong. But this would be to replace dialectics with empiricism. It would also deny the possibility of conscious intervention in the revolutionary process.

Pat Byrne describes the attempt to convene a conference of the socialist parties of Europein Stockholm with the aim of ending the war in order to show the radicalization of the parties of the Second International and the failure of Lenin to assess correctly the mood of the working class. He comments:

> This peace movement put the fear of god into the bourgeois politicians and military leaders. They feared the impact that such a conference could have on the war commitment of its troops and their populations generally. The Allied governments scuppered the conference by the simple procedure of refusing to issue the social democratic leaders with passports to attend it.
>
> The significance of this episode was that for all but the most conscious workers, the mass of working people did not see the socialists in their individual countries either as responsible for the outbreak of the war, nor for its continuation for

> the last two years of it. How else can we interpret the massively increased support for the socialist parties after the War, even in Germany where their betrayal should have been most obvious?

This, more than anything else, shows the radicalization of the workers. Social Democracy leaders were responding to this but they did not have the audacity to act in a revolutionary way. Naturally the first reaction of the workers would be to turn to their leaders for action. Lenin's position was that these leaders would again betray the workers, the failure of Stockholm being a betrayal in any case, and alternative leaderships should be ready to take on the struggle.

Pat Byrne continues:

> Lenin was convinced otherwise. He believed that international social democracy was finished and the masses were only waiting for a revolutionary alternative in order to mobilise for the overthrow of capitalism. This disastrously misjudged the mood of the majority of working people whose initial impulse after the war was plainly to join the traditional social democratic unions and parties in their millions. And in even bigger numbers to vote for new all-socialist governments on a platform of radical social reform. It could only be through experience of the failure of such parties in power that the ground would

> grow for the establishment of mass revolutionnary forces.

Lenin did not 'misjudge the mood of the majority'. He understood correctly the radicalization of the workers and he understood also the inevitability of betrayal by the leaders of Social Democracy. What he was after was to either replace them in the leadership of the working class parties or create new mass revolutionary parties by splitting the old ones. Again, he was not after sects, he was struggling to provide the working class with a revolutionary leadership at a very short notice, he was trying to spread the revolution to other countries before the Russian Revolution ebbed and withered.

The commonest mistake in judging historical events is probably taking them out of context. In the case of Lenin and, to a lesser extent Trotsky, this is by far the most common cause of misunderstanding his politics, his assessments, his actions. For any Leninist, the most exasperating task is probably the defense of the man against accusations of contradictory politics, of inflexibility, of cold blooded ruthlessness. Most of the time, these accusations are missing the point exactly because they fail to understand the intricacies of the situation in which he was working.

Most of the time, these people fail to understand what the specific text is aiming at, what it is trying to explain and what it is trying to achieve. Pat Byrne falls into this trap:

> Even after the obvious setbacks for the communist cause in the four years that followed the War, Trotsky was still misjudging the mood of the workers of the time and simplifying the tasks posed in securing the support of the mass of workers for revolutionary transformation:
>
> > *"Because of this terrible bloody upheaval, the entire working class in Europe was imbued with the revolutionary mood on the very next day after the war. Consequently, one of the subjective factors – the striving to change this world – was on hand. What was lacking? The party was lacking, the party capable of leading the working class to victory."*
>
> Contrast this to the more realistic assessment of Karl Radek, then Secretary of the Communist International and its representative in Germany:
>
> > *"In the victorious countries the workers returned home partly intoxicated with the fumes of patriotism partly under the conviction that the bourgeoisie would prove grateful for the sufferings and sacrifices that had been borne and that a democratic era, an epoch of peace, would follow. Not a proletarian revolution but Wilsonianism, was the slogan of the working masses in the victorious countries.*

> *In the defeated countries, on the contrary, the thirst for peace and quiet predominated over all other proletarian feelings: a morsel of bacon was of more value than dreams for the liberation of mankind. All the dangers threatening this liberation did not exist for the masses. In December 1918 animated crowds of workers filled the streets of the larger towns of Germany, enjoying every little source of pleasure accessible to them then, however humble it might be, not stopping to think for a moment what the forthcoming "peace" would bring them."*

The two assessments are not necessarily at odds. As in any war, the 'day after' is replete with contradictions. Revolutionary yearnings and pacifist wishes can coexist and opposing tensions are the order of the day. What is decisive is the guidance of the leadership. Had there been a revolutionary leadership in the working class parties, there would be revolution (Trotsky's position). Since there was no revolutionary guidance, the masses took a



different course (Radek's assessment). What we see here is two different snapshots of a situation, from two different angles of view. Both are important, both may be true. What Trotsky is trying to achieve is to convince his audience for the need for a revolutionary leadership, for the need to build a revolutionary party. On the other hand, Radek is explaining the actual events, he is describing the social dynamics as they were, without effective revolutionary intervention. This is the way we should try to understand history, not to counterpose superficially the two texts and presume that they are contradictory. If we want to be dialectical, we have to consider all the relevant facts, not just what is seen on the surface. And yet, Pat Byrne characterizes Lenin's position 'undialectical':

> **Undialectical Analysis:** The second problem with Lenin's analysis was that it was clearly undialectical, lumping all the socialist leaders together and posing their political positions in an extremely static way. Yet there were obvious major differences between the various parties and also within them, with a significant section either opposing the war such as the British ILP, or various sections coming out in opposition to it shortly after its outbreak such as within the German SPD. And as the war dragged on into 1917 all the main social democratic leaders in Europe came out very publicly for an end to the war. The advanced workers were of course

> aware of these differences and developments in their parties. Therefore did not respond well to what they saw as the Bolsheviks' sweeping and unfair condemnation of all their leaders.

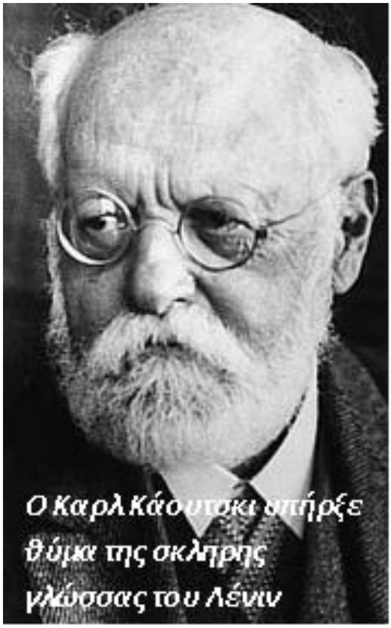
Far from being undialectical, Lenin's analysis is based on the need of the revolution. His assessment of the caliber of the leader's of Social Democracy was not an academic exersise. The question he was answering was: are the leaders of Social Democracy up to the task of carrying out the World Revolution? His answer was no. He did not have the luxury of time. The Russian Revolution was dead if it was isolated. It is in this context, and only in this, that we should seek to interpret Lenin's policies.

He may of course have been wrong. It is conceivable that some of these leaders could be won to revolution. However, he had to make a decision, and the fact that it did not exactly work out is no proof of it being erroneous.

BAD LANGUAGE

One thing that put me off Lenin during my politically formative years was his use of offensive language and seemingly inflexible attitudes. Reading *What is to be Done?*or even

The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky was a traumatic experience in this respect. Contrast this to *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* and *The State and Revolution* to realize the vast difference language and expression can make on the modern reader. However, Lenin was not writing for the benefit of the modern reader. He was trying to intervene politically in a revolutionary way in extremely harsh conditions. His aim was to infuse confidence for the future of revolution, to explain to the workers that they could fight and win. He wanted determined fighters around him, not vacillating intellectuals.



Did his tactics work? Not always. His 'success' at the 1903 Congress of the RSDLP was in reality a disaster. With the benefit of hindsight analysts point to the fact that he gained the 'majority' label from this Congress, which no doubt helped the party's image in

later years, especially during the revolution of 1917. Also with the benefit of hindsight, they see the beginnings of the organizational principle of Democratic Centralism and the concept of the 'party of new type' in this Congress. But the truth is that at that Congress Lenin pushed his comrades to their limits. The split was as devastating as it was unexpected for Lenin, no matter what later Leninist idolatry claims. His later break with Plekhanov had even more disastrous effect on him.

After the Congress, Lenin found himself in a bad situation and he had to deal with it. There was no point in crying over spilled milk. He explains his position and formulates his policies in a brilliant way in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back.* He does not look back in order to change the past, he plans the future.

It is in this light that we should see also the beginnings of the Communist International. The bad language is utterly horrifying to the modern reader, schooled in the ethics of political correctness and the culture of tolerance:

> From the outset and through the early years of the Communist International, the Russian communist leaders resorted to counter-productive denunciation of the social democratic leaders whether of right or left-wing

wings of the movement. They were variously described as "traitors", "counter-revolutionaries", "pimps of the bourgeoisie" "scab leaders", "executioners of the working class" and so on. The Second International was regularly described as the "Yellow International".

Here are a few brief quotations which give a flavour of how the social democratic leaders were regularly described in early CI material:

> *"...the camp of the Second International, which was always consciously counter-revolutionary..."*
> *The Second International is a "conference of enemies of the working class disguised as Socialists"*
> *"This applies not only to the social-patriots who have today clearly and openly gone over to the camp of the bourgeoisie, who have become the latter's favorite plenipotentiaries and trustees and the most reliable executioners of the working class..."*
> *"If you are serious in your longing for the final victory of the world revolution, then you have the most serious and sacred duty to fulfil in German Austria: a war of extermination against that part of the social democracy of German Austria that is represented by the reformist leaders and social-traitors Renner, Bauer, Fritz Adler, Huber, Tomachik and Domes, to name only the best known..."*

In other words, war was declared by the Communists on the social democratic organi-

sations and their leaders. This could not fail but to alienate large number of workers and help the reformist leaders regain support among them.

But war was already going on. The Russian Revolution was for Lenin and Trotsky the beginning of the World Revolution. The lines were drawn, the trenches dug and manned on both sides. Social Democracy was against the Russian Revolution, was to be found in the enemy trenches as seen from the viewpoint of Lenin and Trotsky. The tragedy is not that such a language was used by them, it is that it was ritualistically repeated after the collapse of the dream of World Revolution as a continuation of the Russian Revolution.

The same situation-specific approach should be used when dealing with the Communist International's policy towards Trade Unions:

> **Trade Unions:** The Russian Communists even sought to defeat the socialist leaders by urging the most militant elements to leave the socialist-dominated international organisation of trade unions and join their new Red International of Labour Unions (RILU). Thus the 'Guide on Trade Union Questions' agreed by the Communist International's 2nd Congress laid down that Communists:
>
> > *"must not shrink from splitting the trade union organisations, for by renouncing the split they would at the same time be renouncing the*

> *attempt to turn the unions into a weapon for the revolutionary battle."*

Radek stated in the Congress debate that

> *"We go into the trade unions in order to overthrow the bureaucracy and, if necessary, to split the unions... If resistance put up by the bureaucracy proves to be stronger than we thought we shall not be afraid to smash them."*

This language should not be taken lightly. When talking of 'weapons' and 'revolutionary battles' we are not to understand them in the vague and romantic sense that various would be revolutionaries use them today. These people were talking about the real weapons and the real battles they were involved in as a matter of course. And 'smashing' trade unions that would be used against the revolution was not a sectarian act, it was a necessary pre-emptive strike to deny the enemy a weapon that would be used against them.

What is catastrophic is that this language is still used today, with no revolution at hand, when what we need is to build mass revolutionary parties. And we certainly will not do that by cutting ourselves off from the working class. And this language does cut us off.

BETTING AGAINST ONE'S SIDE

Pat Byrne insists on the 'wrong perspectives' of the Communist International. Time and again he quotes documents and speeches showing that the Communist International, and Lenin in particular, had written off the Second International, something that was not borne out by events, something that did not correspond to the reality on the ground:

> Wildly Incorrect Perspectives: The lack of sober analysis of the mood of the workers in the advanced western countries led the Russian communist leaders from 1918 until 1920 to radically misjudge their perspectives. For example, in the first number of the Comintern periodical Zinoviev, the President of the Communist International wrote:
>
> > *"Old Europe is rushing towards revolution at breakneck speed. In a twelvemonth we shall already have begun to forget that there ever was a struggle for Communism in Europe, for in a year the whole of Europe will be Communist."*
>
> At the 2nd World Congress of the CI, Zinoviev declared:
>
> > *"I am deeply convinced that the Second World Congress of the CI is the precursor of another world congress, the world congress of Soviet Republics."*

With such a wildly incorrect perspective, it is not a surprise that an incorrect strategy, tactics and slogans followed close behind.


Γκριγκόρι Ζηνόβιεφ

Again here we are faced with revolutionary possibilities; we should not judge these perspectives on whether they were borne out or not but on whether they had a chance to be realized. When you are a player, it is criminal to bet against your side, however small its chances are. You have to fight as best you can for victory, you must not predict fatalistically your side's doom. And these people were most certainly players.

In setting up the Communist International, Lenin was confident that social democracy was finished and all it required was for communists to raise their banner and the proletariat would overwhelmingly flock to it. Thus he often described the Second International as a "corpse". In doing so, he misunderstood the loyalty that workers felt towards their parties and trade unions, and their natural instinct to

> try to change their existing organisations, not break away to form new ones.
>
> Far from being finished, the end of the First World War was a boom time for the social democratic parties and their trade unions. Measured in terms of membership, votes and support, they went from strength to strength.

Lenin was not 'confident that social democracy was finished', he was attempting to finish it off. His failure may have left us with a terrible mess, but it is no proof of error. The real question is what alternatives were available for Lenin and the Communist International in those days, within the context of Civil War in Russia and the need to spread the Revolution. Pat Byrne proposes what in normal conditions would be a completely valid course:

> Thus revolution in most countries was not immediately on the agenda at the end of the War, even if there had been significant revolutionnary forces ready to fight for it. Even in shattered Germany, patience, sober propaganda and tactics were needed to build up the strength of the revolutionary movement in preparation for the coming time when the workers saw through the newly-elected social democratic government.

That of course would have been too late for the Russians. The objective was not to plan for the future but to throw into battle as many revolutionary forces as possible. So,

> …representatives of the Communist International (CI) labouring under these incorrect perspectives were despatched from the Soviet Union with a mission to persuade the best lefts to group together in each country under one Communist Party banner. In most cases this entailed persuading the most revolutionary elements within social democracy to break away and join the new parties.
>
> This mission met serious resistance in many countries. While some anarchist tendencies and newly formed extreme left groups welcomed this complete break with the old social democratic parties and their union federations, this was not so popular with many left socialists no matter how much they supported the Bolsheviks on other matters. Most of the older socialist militants remained committed to the marxist tradition of one united movement and feared that a left split would weaken the workers' forces. Their natural inclination was to fight to win a majority for revolutionary action within their existing organisations, rather than abandon them to the discredited right go off to create pure but unproven parties.

In their own way, these 'older socialist militants' may have been right. Nevertheless, this meant abandoning the prospect of immediate World Revolution and, in effect, abandoning the Russian Revolution. Even if we accept that Lenin and Trotsky misjudged

the 'mood of the class' that would be almost exclusively because of the stance of these '*older socialist militants… committed to the Marxist tradition*', the stance of the '*many left socialists no matter how much they supported the Bolsheviks*'.

No wonder then the venomous language coming from the Communist International. And seen from this angle, it is their stance that prevented the development of the World Revolution. If in this assessment Lenin and the Communist International were right, and I believe they were, the treachery of Social Democratic leaders is the root cause of the revolutionary defeats in the West, of the rise of Stalinism, the ascent of Hitler and, finally, the Second WorldWar.

In this light, the leaders of Social Democracy probably deserved the CI's abuse. However, the abuse was no moral chastening, was no vending of anger. It was a '*weapon*' used in the struggle against those siding with the bourgeoisie during an ongoing revolutionary war. It is no excuse for today's sects to point to that language as an excuse for their own abusive language coming out of their comfortable intellectual lives.

Pat Byrne's suggested line of action fails to understand the context of the creation of the Communist International:

> The Russian Social democrats, having achieved a socialist revolution should logically have sought to encourage social democrats across the world to emulate their success, encouraging and helping them to create revolutionary wings of social democracy to this end. There were many reasons to believe that such a strategy would have met with great success.

The problem is that there was no time for that. The Revolution would either be spread worldwide or be crushed. That was the perspective. That it was not exactly crushed but degenerated into the Stalinist monstrosity is no comfort for revolutionaries.

To ask of Lenin and Trotsky to 'encourage and help [Social Democrats] to create revolutionary wings of social democracy' implicitly accepts the concept of socialism in one country. It implicitly supposes that Russia could remain a healthy worker's state for a long period of time – many years, if not decades. That this was not possible flowed not only from their theory, it was brought home every day by the economic and social pressures they were faced with.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY OR COMMUNISM?

Pat Byrne proposes that the Bolsheviks should have taken part in the efforts to build the 'old International'.

It might have been thought that the old Second International leaders would have tried to exclude the Bolsheviks from attending those conferences held in order to revive the old International. Quite apart from the fact that they had carried through the October revolution and were calling for the abolition of parliamentary democracy, the Bolsheviks were denouncing the socialist leaders in the most offensive terms. Nevertheless, such was the mood of sympathy among advanced workers for the Russian Revolution, and the support for the Bolsheviks that existed in so many socialist parties, the leading figures had no option but to officially invite them to the international Socialist conference in Lausanne, and then to the conference of European Social Democrats to be held in Paris or Berne in February 1919. The Bolsheviks refused these invitations and embarked on building a new international.



This was tragic mistake. There was everything to play for in the socialist movement. The Bolsheviks should logically have been at the forefront of the demands for a new Socialist

> International with a revolutionary programme and a revolutionary leadership to carry it out.

It is quite possible that the Bolshevik refusal to attend was a misjudgment. But this is a matter of assessment of whether their presence there would have made a difference or not. In the heat of the events of 1919 it is no wonder the Bolsheviks could think in terms of black and white (or, if you prefer, red and white);in terms of 'with us or against us'.

Even if they went there, the outcome would in all probability be an equally divisive split. In all probability the Bolsheviks would have asked for the support of the Russian Revolution in the form of revolutions in the rest of Europe. In all probability that would be refused. Would I prefer them to have gone there and try this route too? Yes, I would. But this does not make my wish better than their decision.

Pat Byrne is also making too much out of Lenin's defeat in his attempt to change the party name in the spring of 1917 to 'Communist Party' and his later successful return to the matter a year later, after the October Revolution.

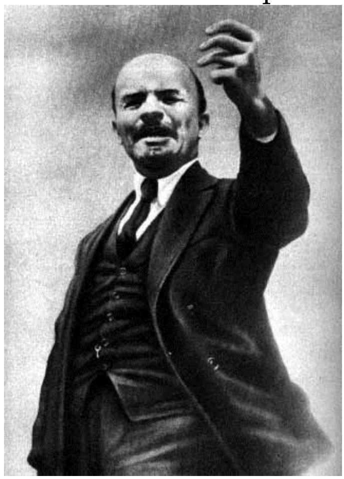
> However, Lenin was actually defeated on two important proposals contained in the [April] Theses. Defeats that have been generally overlooked. It began with a proposal to change the

party name. Lenin proposed that in the midst of the revolution that the party change its name to the Russian Communist Party. For the sake of brevity, I only quote here the central part of Lenin's speakers' notes with his original emphasis retained:

> *"WHAT SHOULD BE THE NAME OF OUR PARTY — ONE THAT WILL BE CORRECT SCIENTIFICALLY AND HELP TO CLARIFY THE MIND OF THE PROLETARIAT POLITICALLY?*
>
> *I now come to the final point, the name of our Party. We must call ourselves the Communist Party – just as Marx and Engels called themselves. We must repeat that we are Marxists and that we take as our basis the Communist Manifesto, which has been distorted and betrayed by the Social-Democrats on its two main points: (1) the working men have no country: "defence of the fatherland" in an imperialist war is a betrayal of socialism; and (2) the Marxist doctrine of the state has been distorted by the Second International ... the majority (that is the truth, that is a fact) of the "Social-Democratic" leaders, of the "Social-Democratic" parliament-arians, of the "Social-Democratic" newspapers – and these are precisely the organs that influence the people – have deserted socialism, have betrayed socialism and have gone over to the side of "their own" national bourgeoisie.*
>
> *The people have been confused, led astray and deceived by these leaders. And we shall*

aid and abet that deception if we retain the old and out-of-date Party name, which is as decayed as the Second International!"30

Lenin anticipated that there would be opposition to his proposal. He even anticipated some of the arguments. I reproduce them at some length because they anticipate the fundamental problems that his strategy faced in subsequent years:



"Granted that "many" workers understand Social-Democracy in an honest way; but it is time to learn how to distinguish the subjective from the objective. Subjectively, such Social-Democratic workers are most loyal leaders of the proletarians. Objectively, however, the world situation is such that the old name of our Party makes it easier to fool the people and impedes the onward march...

And what are the arguments against? ...We'll be confused with the Anarchist-Communists, they say... We are told: The people are used to it, the workers have come to "love" their Social-Democratic Party.

> *That is the only argument. But it is an argument that dismisses the science of Marxism, the tasks of the morrow in the revolution, the objective position of world socialism, the shameful collapse of the Second International, and the harm done to the practical cause by the packs of "would-be Social-Democrats" who surround the proletarians.*
>
> *It is an argument of routinism, an argument of inertia, an argument of stagnation... Yet we are afraid of our own selves. We are loth to cast off the "dear old" soiled shirt. ...But it is time to cast off the soiled shirt and to put on clean linen."31*

The objections to the proposal to rename the party must be familiar to even the modern day reader. Workers tend to be loyal to their organisations and traditions within which party names take a significant place. They do not cast them off like a "soiled shirt". Lenin tries to answer his objections by pointing to objective problems with the social democratic name and the associations it has acquired. But this was not how the Russian workers saw social democracy. For them it was their party and the leading force against their oppression and exploitation.

Lenin's proposal was probably premature, if not altogether wrong. Note however that, both

in this quotation as well as the previous one, Lenin is speaking very concretely:

> '...the world situation is such...'
>
> '...it is an argument that dismisses... the tasks of the morrow in the revolution...'
>
> '...it is an argument of routinism, an argument of inertia...'
>
> '...But it is time to cast off the soiled shirt...'

What he was trying to do was to transform his party into a potent weapon of revolution and he considered the change in the name part of this process. The fact that this specific change did not prove necessary, does not say much. A year later, the parameters were completely changed and Lenin's proposal could command the majority of the Central Committee and the Bolshevik party in general. Whether Lenin was just taking his revenge, as Byrne seems to suggest, or it was enough that the objective situation was more favourable for such a change must remain in the realm of conjecture and is completely immaterial as far as revolutionary history is concerned. What is immensely important is noted by Byrne:

> Does not the subjective opinions of working people acquire an objective character when they become a material force that affects the course of history?

> Unfortunately, Lenin's answers echo far too accurately the typical arguments of later generations of sectarians.

This is the real problem. With no revolution in progress, no immediate battles to fight, it makes no sense to engage in verbal guerilla warfare against leaders who obviously command the respect and the trust of the workers. Now is the time of analysis, of policy forming, of training, of organising; it is the time for reaching people – not shooting at them. Lenin was not oblivious to the fact that policies were time-dependent, that shifting objective conditions should be met by adjusted policies:

> Thus in many of the new Communist Parties the majority of the membership tended towards ultraleft and sectarian attitudes. This often featured in opposition to work in trade unions and participation in parliamentary elections. Even in a tendency towards putschist adventures where insurrections would be attempted without the support of the mass of the workers.
>
> Lenin was surprised and disturbed by these tendencies and tried to stem them with a determined struggle within the Communist International. His pamphlet 'Left-wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder' was written specifically for this struggle against the developing ultraleft currents in the new International. For example, Lenin had to remind those communists who opposed work in the trade unions that:

"If you want to help the "masses" and win the sympathy and support of the "masses", you should not fear difficulties, or pinpricks, chicanery, insults and persecution from the "leaders" (who, being opportunists and social-chauvinists, are in most cases directly or indirectly connected with the bourgeoisie and the police), but must absolutely work wherever the masses are to be found. You must be capable of any sacrifice, of overcoming the greatest obstacles, in order to carry on agitation and propaganda systematically, perseveringly, persistently and patiently in those institutions, societies and associations – eventhe most reactionary – in which proletarian or semi-proletarian masses are to be found....

Millions of workers in Great Britain, France and Germany are for the first time passing from a complete lack of organization to the elementary, lowest, simplest, and (to those still thoroughly imbued with bourgeois-democratic prejudices) most easily comprehensible form of organization, namely, the trade unions.

Yet the revolutionary, but imprudent, Left Communists stand by, crying out, 'the masses, the masses!' but refusing to work within the trade unions, on the pretext that they are 'reactionary,' and they invent a brand-new immaculate little 'Workers Union' which is guiltless of bourgeois-democratic prejudices and innocent of craft or narrow-

> *minded craft union sins, a union whichthey claim will be (!) a broad organization."*

> While Lenin's statement here on the unions was absolutely correct, the fact that he had to fight for such a basic position only demonstrated the unhealthy tendencies that the creation of a separate left international had called into being. The reader might also have spotted the obvious contradiction between Lenin's insistence in regard to the trade unions that communists "must absolutely work wherever the masses are to be found" etc. but not to apply the same principle to work in the mass social democratic parties, as Lenin himself had done for decades with such startling success?

Again, it is important to place Lenin's position in context. By the time 'Left Wing Communism' was written, the time-scale of Lenin for the World Revolution was running out and the theoretical inadequacy of the CI sections was becoming apparent. It is not enough to trace these ultra-left tendencies in the policy of the creation of new communist parties. True, these policies probably lay at their root, but only in conjunction with the failure of the revolution in the West. The more the Russian Revolution remained isolated, the more the policies of spreading the revolution were becoming irrelevant, the more the communist parties in the West were isolated themselves.

The picture was even clearer by the time of the Third Congress of the Communist International:

> It quickly became clear that, contrary to all the new International's assumptions, the majority of workers remained loyal to the social democrats. The Third Congress of the CI reluctantly admitted this:
>
> > *"The most important question before the Communist International today is to win predominating influence over the majority of the working class, and to bring its decisive strata into the struggle. For despite the objectively revolutionary situation ... the majority of workers are still not under communist influence."*
>
> A new approach was obviously needed. Accordingly, the CI picked up on the United Front tactic first developed by the German Communist Party. In this the Communists proposed united fronts with the social democrats on the basis of concrete campaigns and policies. The idea was that through


Ε. Λέβιν: Σοσιαλιστικη Δημοκρατία της Βαυαρίας 1919

> experience the rank and file social democratic workers would see how their leaders behaved and be attracted to the more consistent and principle position of the communist movement. But it was a very poor substitute for a united mass movement and ran counter to everything the Communist International had been striving for in the previous two years.

If anything, this further shows the ability of the Communist International to realize that the situation had changed, that its expectations had not materialized and a different course should be sought. The revolution was moving from the offensive to the defensive. United Front policy was not any more about spreading the revolution *now*, it was about winning the class, building for the future. The policy now was on the one hand to keep the Russian Revolution alive and on the other to build revolutionary mass parties in the West.

THE SPLITS IN THE ITALIAN AND THE GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Where Byrne is at his best is in describing the splits in the Social Democratic party of Italy. Here, he convincingly shows the inadequacy of the policies and actions of the Communist International. Whatever justification there may be of the general policies of the International, there can be no way one can excuse their specific behaviour in this case. A

concrete situation demands concrete measures, not generalized recipies. It is worth quoting extensively from the text, as there is no other way to get the feel of the events it describes:

> The end of the war was followed by a wave of radicalisation. The pro-war government had lost all credibility:
>
> *"...Italy in 1919-1920 seethed with continual unrest. The soldiers, reading the revolutionary papers, no longer obeyed their officers. The officers no longer obeyed the government, but favoured D'Annunzio. The Ministers had forfeited all moral prestige, and moreover had not enough force at their command to maintain order; they were swayed this way and that by the threats of anyone who succeeded in frightening them..."*



GIACINTO MENOTTI SERRATI

> In this situation, the Italian socialists posed as the main alternative. And it was one of the most left-wing socialist movements in Europe:

> *"In August 1919 a Socialist Manifesto proclaimed that 'the proletariat must be incited to the violent seizure of political and economic power, and this must be handed over entirely and exclusively to the Workers' and Peasants' Councils."*

The radicalisation of the Italian Socialist Party was also reflected on the international stage. They openly supported the Russian Revolution and there was a great feeling of mutual solidarity between the Italian and Russian proletariat:

> *"Of all the Socialist movements, the Italian had been the most appreciated by the Russians. The Italian Socialists, and Serrati in particular, had saved the Bolsheviks from virtual isolation from Western Europe."*

The Italian Socialists were also fortunate in having in GiacintoSerrati, a leader far above the average of his European counterparts. Often compared to Bebel, the follower of Marx and founder of the German Social Democratic Party, Serrati was known to all as honest and self-sacrificing marxist. He had been imprisoned for the cause on numerous occasions and had bravely opposed the war.

> *"Serrati was in Gramsci's judgement, the most popular man in Italy, 'known and loved by the mass of the Italian people... more beloved than any party leader has ever been before in our country.'"*

Affiliating to the Communist International

In the Autumn of 1919 the Italian Socialist Party Congress under the leadership of Serrati voted by a large majority to affiliate to the new Communist International. A reformist minority led by Turati reluctantly accepted the decision in the interests of Party unity. The Italian Socialist Party was one of the first to join the Communist International. As the first mass affiliate this was an important boost to the credibility of the CI.

However, Lenin's reaction to the Italian decision to affiliate was highly ambivalent. It did not fit in with his strategy of creating new communist parties untainted by the stain of reformism. He wrote that the Italians must "drive Turati and company out of the party with scorn and contempt." Lenin's attitude was confirmed at the Second Congress of the Communist International when they adopted the strict 21 Conditions governing who could affiliate to the new International. However, Serrati rejected this approach, complaining that the far-reaching conditions had been presented to the International Congress delegates without any warning, and without any opportunity to discuss them in their own party ranks.



For example, among the 21 Conditions was a clause requiring all affiliates change their name to that of Communist Party. A large majority of the Italian Section were opposed to dropping their Italian Socialist Party title. They felt that it would unnecessarily alienate the Italian workers who were proud of their socialist party and its stand against the war. This reluctance was well advised as we soon saw in France. There the light-minded decision of the Socialist Party to change its name to Communist, made it much easier for the right-wing rump under Leon Blum to claim the old socialist tradition and thereby to quickly outstrip the Communists in membership and votes.

The Italian Socialist Party Congress carried a motion declaring:

> *"Finally, with regard to the conditions demanded by the 17th Point, the Congress, considering that the Italian Socialist party did not stain her banner in the years of the World War, and to keep yesterday's and tomorrow's expellees from taking over the glorious name of Socialist party, under which banner the party is known to the proletarian masses, asks the Executive Committee of the Third International to consent that the name be provisionally retained."*

Another important condition for belonging to the Communist International was that its member parties immediately expel any reformists from within their ranks. Serrati on behalf of a large majority of the Party accepted

the proposal to expel the reformist minority from the party, but asked for time in which to prepare the Italian workers for this separation. Serrati felt that it was not possible to rush forward with crude organisational measures against the reformist minority led by Turati. Turati was admired for his honesty and sincerity by all wings of the party and still had tremendous respect among Italian workers for his principled stand against the war. An added factor was that the leaders of the two million strong Confederation of Labour had indicated they would break away in this event. An 'out of the blue' expulsion in such circumstances would seriously divide the movement to the disadvantage of the revolutionary forces, and would not be understood by the masses.

Lenin reacted bitterly to Serrati's opposition

> *"At a time like this we must not only expel the Mensheviks from the party...but we must also throw out good communists (Serrati for example) if they start swaying about and especially if they swing towards union with the reformists."*



The German Communist leader Paul Levi met Serrati on the eve of the decisive 1921 Italian Congress. Levi reported to the Executive of the Communist Internatio-nal:

> *"This is what Serrati told me: He and his parliamentary group were determined to eliminate the reformists. However, as things now stood in Italy, it would be extremely difficult to do this presently and abruptly. The conflicts between the two wings of the Italian party had not come to a head sufficiently for that, and he felt that the required steps had not been yet been taken by everyone to make these conflicts apparent...The reformists in the party were relatively leftist in Italy because the most blatant reformists had already been excluded in Reggio Emilia in 1912. He stated with due firmness that he was determined to exclude the reformists from his parliamentary group, but that this had to be done in such a way that the masses would understand the reasons for this exclusion."*

Lenin's argument was that the need to purge the reformists was the first priority of the Italian Party. In doing so he used the experience of the Bolsheviks to make his point:

> *"Comrade Lazzari said: "We are in the preparatory period." This is absolutely true. You are in the preparatory period. The first stage of this period is a break with the Mensheviks, similar to the one we brought about with our Mensheviks in 1903... When that is brought about the masses will side solidly with communism."*

We shall see in due course how wrong Lenin's assumption was that the Italian masses would come over to communism once it had separated

from reformism. But Lenin seemed to forget his own history. 1903 did not represent a decisive break with menshevism. The split in 1903 was over an obscure constitutional question. It wasn't until later that the political differences really emerged. Nor did the split represent a decisive break. The RSDLP continued but with two factions. As explained earlier, the split did not become permanent until 1912 and over extremely clear and favourable grounds for Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Namely, the adoption by the Mensheviks of a policy of the winding up the Party in favour of legal work. The Bolsheviks argued for continuation of the Party, a position which was easy to justify and for all Russian social democratic workers to understand.

All Serrati and his comrades were arguing for was the preparation of similarly strong grounds on which to justify expulsion of the reformists. But he was portrayed in the Communist International as siding with, protecting and supporting the reformists.

Factory Occupations

In the midst of the debates on the 21 Conditions, the northern industrial workers of Turin and Milan occupied their factories in September 1920. A revolutionary atmosphere gripped the country. The leadership of the Socialist Party were seized by indecision. The more conservative union leaders utilisedthis indecision to manoeuvre and after some time call off the occupation in return for concessions. The only group to emerge out of the events with

credit historically was the New Order movement led by Gramsci, but the absence of any serious post mortem within the Socialist Party was indicative of the lack of any strategy for overturning the old order. This should have been the key debate within the revolutionary ranks before and after the factory occupations. Instead, the central issue became the CI's 21 Conditions and particularly the expulsion or otherwise of the right-wing. Indeed the sit-in movement was used more as part of this argument than the other way round.

Meanwhile, the ruling class of Italy was mortified by the revolutionary potential shown by the workers in the factory occupations. For them the situation demanded desperate counter measures. However, Government action was not a viable possibility as huge Socialists gains in the 1919 elections prevented any strong right-wing administration taking office. Extra parliamentary action against the labour movement was urgently required and Mussolini's fascist bands stepped in to fill this need. Growing bolder by each month, their hired guns began to terrorise and in time take over radical farming towns and later workers' districts. As an unusual cover, the fascist bands assimilated the structures of the provincial unions and peasant organisationsutilising them for their own purposes. Local resistance was met with assassination and bombings.

Yet the response of the national workers movement was amazing by its absence. The

Congress of the Socialist Party, despite being postponed for a month and transferred from Florence to Livorno because of fascist attacks in the former city, spent not one minute discussing the looming fascist threat. Instead, it entirely concentrated on the demand of the Communist International for the expulsion of the reformist minority.

Lenin in an article entitled 'The Struggle within the Italian Socialist Party' written in November 1920 showed how much he misjudged the new situation in the country. He asserted that

> *"Everyone sees and admits that the revolutionary crisis is becoming nationwide. By its actions the proletariat has shown itself capable of rising spontaneously and of uplifting the masses into a powerful revolutionary movement."*

Yet as he wrote these words, the opposite was now happening. The revolutionary crisis had passed and the initiative was rapidly passing towards reaction. No doubt Lenin had limited information. Communications into Russia were extremely poor, made worse by the third rate Comintern representatives on whose reports Lenin was basing many of his judgements. But this was yet another reason why it was foolish for the Comintern to try to act like the all-knowing general staff of the world revolution.

Ironically, the rising fascist threat was also a great opportunity. As Karl Marx had once written: 'revolution sometimes needs the whip of

> counterrevolution to push it forward.' Mussolini's fascist challenge offered the revolutionary left in Italy the chance to become the champions of democracy, giving them back the initiative in the struggle. It could have exposed the role of the state and the leading bourgeois politicians who were secretly arming, staffing and financing the fascist movement. This would have destroyed the last shreds of credibility of the ruling class. Last but not least, it could have provided the basis for the formation of a workers militia throughout the country accompanied by an appeal to the soldiers to refuse to obey the illegal commands of the secret fascist-state conspiracy.
>
> The threat of counter-revolution is a normal phase in the maturing of society for a final revolutionary upsurge. But the reactionary threat cannot be ignored or the movement risks being drowned in blood. It must be met decisively and defeated, and in this process the authority of the workers movement can grow immeasurably.

One could argue that had the Italian Party been as revolutionarily inclined as described above, the indecision would not be there.The discussion on tactics should take precedence over the discussion on the name and the expulsions, but it is unlikely that the occupations were seen as important at the time as they proved to be. And certainly, the ones responsible for this assessment are the

Italians, not the Russians.In Lenin's perspective this indecision would be due to the presence of reformists in the party leadership, thus the urgent need to expel them. Whatever way you look at it, the desperately inadequately timetable for the World revolution was imposing its own logic.

But this will not do. The emphasis should be in discussing revolutionary tactics, in promoting revolution. If in the process the reformists refused to go along, the split would be a result of a real revolutionary need, not a formal following of CI's directives. The question is not whether it is 'correct' to form a new party, rename the party or throw out the reformists. We should judge the behaviour of the CI by its own criteria. That is, what policy would promote immediate revolution? And in this its policies are found wanting.

The situation was not made any better by the heavy-handed way the policies of the International were imposed. Again, an extensive quote from the text is worth reproducing:

> Shortly after the beginning of the Congress the Bulgarian CI Representative Kabakchiev mounted the rostrum and proceeded to read out a statement from the Executive Committee of the Communist International which had been signed by Zinoviev, Lenin, Bela Kun and Bukharin. At the core of the statement was an ultimatum which showed no consideration for

the democratic processes of the Italian labour movement:

> *"before knowing what will be the majority opinion at your congress, [we declare that] those who refuse to accept the separation from the reformists violate an essential order of the Communist International and, by that alone, place themselves outside of it."*

This was bound to alienate the congress delegates. So too was Kabakchiev's constant attacks on their leader, Serrati. Paul Levi who attended the Italian Congress representing his own party pointed out in his report to the CI:

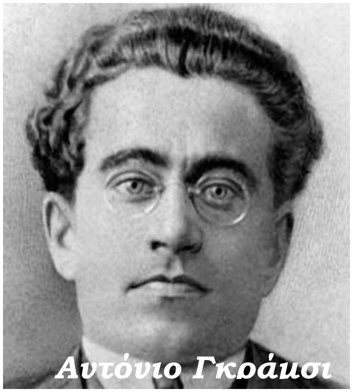
> *"The statement did not make a favourable impression, on structural grounds alone. It was twenty six typed pages long, much too long to be read off at a congress, let alone an Italian congress, with any hope of its being at all effective. Another mistake was that the entire lengthy statement was devoted solely to an attack upon Serrati, which profoundly upset the assemblage, which after all did constitute a majority of the congress where Serrati supporters outnumbered the others at least three to one."*

The description in Antonio Gramsci's own report of the Congress confirmed Levi's account:

> *"The truth, bluntly stated by Kabakchiev, offended too many persons, too many feelings, too many interests. Each of the Bulgarian's charges were followed by shouts of 'It's not true' from the unitarians and 'wonderful' from*

> *the communists until the theatre was sheer bedlam...only the playing of the Internationale eventually calmed the Assembly."*

Even Zinoviev was forced to admit in his report to the Third Communist International Congress:



> *"It was literally transformed into a circus. When Kabakchiev got up to speak, they shouted 'long live the Pope!' Someone released a dove..."*

Given the belief of the CI leaders in their own infallibility, perhaps the majority of Italian delegates had the better measure of the situation.

After five days of debate, Kabakchiev bluntly declared that

> *"all factions that do not completely accept the theses of the Communist International will be excluded from it."*

In the vote that followed, Serrati's 'Unitary Communist' group's statement gained 98,023 votes to 58,753 for the CI's position, and 14,695 for Turati's reformists. The CI's Executive Committee meeting in Moscow immediately heard the result and discussed the terms of a telegram announcing the expulsion of Serrati

from the International and the formation of an Italian Communist Party. According to Radek's report justifying the decision to the German Communist Party on the 28th January 1921:

> *"The Executive Committee was hesitant about sending the telegram. Zinoviev wanted to wait, but Lenin forced the decision through."*

Accordingly, the supporters of the CI's position, approximately a third of the delegates, walked out of the Socialist Party Congress. Meeting in a nearby hall which was 'conveniently available', they formed the Italian Communist Party. The Communist International immediately sent a message of greeting to them:

> *"We are deeply convinced that the awakened workers of your country will join you in increasing numbers every day…the future belongs to you."*

At the CI's Third Congress which took place just two months later, Lenin greeted the result of the vote as

> *"a big victory; a tangible proof; a fact which shows that the labour movement in Italy will develop faster than our movement in Russia..."*

However, once again the Comintern badly misjudged the situation. The votes of the Congress delegates represented only the view of the activists. It was quite a different story among the Italian labour movement.

> *"The party was split, the communists obtaining about a third of the votes. Even this*

> *was no true picture, for the masses were much more for Serrati and against the Comintern than the activists who had voted at Leghorn. The whole bulk of Italian labour left the Comintern... while outside the Fascists were smashing the labour movement. The Comintern had lost the one big country in which it had dominated the labour movement as a whole, and the men who, a few months ago, had been carried in triumph shoulder-high by the workers of Leningrad and Moscow were now insulted as traitors.”('The Communist International' by F. Borkenau, p.212)*

Contrary to the Comintern’s assumptions that the Italian proletariat were just waiting for a decisive break with the reformists before transferring their allegiance over to the communists, the parliamentary elections held four months after the split in the Italian Socialist Party were a humiliation for the new party. To the Socialist Party’s 128 seats, the Communists only won 13. And the combined total of both parties was a significant decline from the election two years before. Ominously, the

> *“election was marred by an orgy of Fascist violence, with 40 people killed on polling day alone.” (‘The Rise of Italian Fascism’ by Andrew Boxer, p.28)*

The election only reflected the damage that the split had wreaked on the Italian labour movement. Within a year of the Livorno Socialist

Party Congress, far from strengthening the workers' movement, the CI had succeeded in causing it to split into three parts with many workers dropping out in confusion and demoralisation. The 216,000 members that made up the united Socialist Party in 1921 fell within a year to less than 100,000 in all factions. The communists, as we shall see, were the most affected by this dramatic decline. Ironically, and despite all the CI's earlier descriptions of him as an 'opportunist', 'traitor' etc., Serrati was soon back as a respected member, even as a delegate to the CI's Fourth World Congress in 1922. He died a loyal communist.

And Serrati's earlier argument for the need for patience in the struggle within the Italian Socialist Party was supported by the internal trajectory of the Party. Before the premature rupture imposed by the Communist International, the most revolutionary wing had increased its support within the previous year from 5% to 35% and had actually achieved a majority of the administrative council of the party. Then, only eighteen months after the fateful split, the remaining Socialist Party membership at its Rome Congress voted to affiliate to Moscow and accept the Conditions including expulsion of the reformist minority. Accordingly, the reformists walked out. But the damage had already been done.

The prediction in Levi's report to the Communist International written just before the

Italian split turned out to be unerringly accurate:

> *"All in all, I think we will greatly weaken our position in Italy for a long time to come if we now and under these circumstances carry out a break with Serrati... I am not referring here to Serrati personally but to the large mass of revolutionary proletarians who will remain estranged from us for many years. I will even be so bold as to point out to you what effect this split will have in other countries, where we already must bear the onus of splitting the proletariat."*

A few months after the split, Zinoviev issued an official CI statement in which he accused Serrati of preferring the reformists over the communists:

> *"If Serrati united with the Reformists against the Communists, this was solely for the simple reason that he felt a greater affinity and sympathy with the Reformists than with the Communists. Before this supremely significant fact all the animated arguments fall concerning the pretended errors committed by the Italian Communists, or Executive Committee of the Communist International, which was said to have "driven" poor Serrati toward the Opportunists. In reality, Serrati was repulsed towards the Opportunists because he wanted to be. He came to be allied with Turati against the Italian Communists for the sole reason that he desired and sought*

> *that alliance. Whoever does not see this is simply a child, in politics."*

> In Zinoviev's 'childish' political world, there were only two possible political answers to what was in reality a complex tactical issue of how to overcome the reformists in such a way as to minimise sympathy for their cause. In the Comintern's inflexible scenario one had only to choose between the reformists or the Communist International, the classic sectarian "you are either for us or against us" attitude. In fact, subsequent events proved that the CI were wrong about Serrati. He continued to consider himself a revolutionary and joined the Communist Party in due course. But the whole experience broke his health and morale. He died in 1926 at the age of 51 on the way to a communist meeting.

As argued above, the CI's 'you are either for us or against us' stems not from sectarian attitudes but from the pressing need for promoting revolution in the West. Whatever mistakes the CI made must not be confused with today's sects. It is one thing to take rush decisions which may be problematic or even outright catastrophic in the middle of the battle and another to insist on inflexible dogmatic attitudes in more tranquil times. Where CI's policies in the case of the Italian split fail is in that they may have destroyed a potentially revolutionary opportunity, not

whether or not they followed an acceptable revolutionary etiquette.

Anequally sad story emerges from the narrative on the German split. Again, the CI's failure to understand the needs of the German situation led to disaster. Here however the validity of the CI's policy is not as clearly illogical as in the Italian case. One can see the push towards premature action that cost the lives of hundreds of communists but this was probably more a result of desperation rather than anything else.

> Levi reported back to his German Party comrades on what had happened in Italy and tried to draw some conclusions. Pierre Broué in his authoritative history of the German Revolution goes into some detail on what happened. Levi argued that:
>
> > *"A split was necessary, but with Turati, not Serrati, and the representatives of the International had desired and prepared the split with Serrati... 'There exist two ways, with these masses organisationally linked with the Third International, to reach a higher level of communist experience and communist will. One lies in educating them through fresh splits, and the other in politically educating these masses who have come towards us, going through this revolutionary period with them, and in this way reaching a higher level, with the masses and amongst the masses.'"*

Levi compared the success in Germany to the failure in Italy and showed that he was beginning to draw conclusions about the destructive approach of the Communist International:

> *"In a mass party such as the workers' parties of the West, one could not proceed, as the successful split in the Independent Party had shown, 'to splits on the basis of resolutions, but only on the basis of political life', through activity and conviction produced by experience... The Italian split was a dangerous precedent, the sign that the ECCI was in the process of going down the road of educating the Communist masses 'not by progressive education, but by mechanical splits'."*

Levi's criticism enraged Moscow. Radek, who was in Germany on behalf of the International, launched into a sharp but unsuccessful attack on him in the German party's Political Committee. Radek had for some time been secretly working with the ultraleft faction in the Party. Together they favoured a more active and dramatic party strategy. This included the lunatic 'Theory of the Offensive' which was to lead to the launching of armed communist uprisings in the hope that this would spark a mass response from the workers. However, Levi and the Spartacist leadership of the Party were an obstacle to these plans.

Within weeks, the Italian Question flared up again with the arrival in Berlin of Rakosi. Rakosi accused Levi of having collaborated with

Serrati to resist the CI's instructions. According to Pierre Broué's account this was not true. Nevertheless, Rakosi succeeded in convincing Thalheimer and Stoecker to move a motion at the Political Committee against Levi's interpretation of Italian events. This was heavily defeated.

Broué continues his account:

> *"But the ECCI did not give up. Rákosi also attended the meeting of the Central Committee on 22 February. He made a violent attack, denying Levi's statement that the greater part of the revolutionary workers had remained with Serrati, whilst the Communist Party only took semi-anarchist and syndicalist elements. He said that when Levi spread such slanders he was trying to deceive the German Party. "In full cry, Rákosi then developed his own analysis. Whilst he did not repeat what he had said in private to Zetkin – that the VKPD (German Communist Party - ed) had too many members, and that a good number of its 400,000 should go – he declared that the split at Livorno should 'serve as an example', and that, if necessary, there would have to be 'splits, ten times over if need be, whether in Italy, France or Germany, in the interests of political clarity'... Levi saw Rákosi's statement as a declaration of war by the ECCI; he decided that the problem was no longer an accidental affair, as he had believed, but a political line which affected the construction of every Party."*

> With the help and authority of the Comintern's representatives, the ultraleft faction managed to defeat the Political Committee line on Italy by a margin of 28-23. This provoked the resignation of the Party leadership including Paul Levi, Ernst Daumig, Klara Zetkin and other key officials. Thus the link with Rosa Luxemburg was broken. They were immediately replaced by a largely ultraleft leadership. In concert with Bela Kun who arrived from Moscow, they immediately started laying plans for the putschist March Action which was to lead to the death of hundreds of communists, decimate the membership and severely damage the credibility of the German communists. The Party was able in subsequent years to rebuild some of its support but it never regained the leadership it needed to win over the majority of German workers.



Here we can see a tragedy unfolding in the context of a desperate Russian Revolution trying to spark off a revolution in Germany that would break the isolation of Russia and continue the World Revolution. It is clear that Paul Levi, Ernst Daumig, Klara Zetkin and the rest of the leadership of the German party that

did not follow the Communists did not share Lenin's view of the developing World Revolution, they were still thinking in terms of building the forces of communism on a national level. In their frame of mind they were probably right not being prepared to gamble the fate of German communism on the slim chance of triggering revolution. To Lenin and the CI this looked like desertion. It is not without significance that Radek, implicitly praised by Byrne for his cool assessment for the objective situation after the war and his apparent skeptical stance on the Italian split, was the CI's operative in the German one. Radek is no 'third rate' cadre, he is one of the best minds and one of the most capable revolutionaries to work with Lenin and Trotsky.

Neither Lenin nor Trotsky was infallible. Certainly, neither was the CI. Pat Byrne's narrative is a valuable contribution and goes a long way to redress a curse of modern revolutionary politics, namely the tendency to formulate policies not on the merits of the specific situation but on the writings and actions of the great leaders and theoreticians of the past without a critical appraisal and without understanding the specific situation that those writings were written and those actions took place in.

We should however be careful not to confuse the extreme actions during the revolution with Stalinism's horrors or today's bureaucratic behaviour of sect leaderships. Robesbierre at some stage accused Danton of wanting a revolution without a revolution. It is not possible to expect normal or civil procedures during such world shattering events. At best, a revolutionary leadership can manage to stay afloat in the revolutionary storm and guide it in its general direction. As events unfold with the rapidity and destructive power of a hurricane, it finds itself captive to its actions taken at each previous stage, it has to follow a logic that is not completely controlled by it.

In fact, the real question whether Lenin was right, is a question not even Pat Byrne dares to ask: could the revolution win at all? Are the accusations of bourgeois historians and Social Democracy that the October Revolution was premature correct? This assessment was the position of the Mensheviks at the time of the revolution. Gorky attacked Lenin viciously at the time prophesying a bloody end to the October revolution. Lenin and Trotsky justified the October takeover only in terms of setting off the fuse for the World Revolution. They were absolutely consistent in this, as shown by their behaviour in the Brest-Litovsk treaty and later in their attempt to ferment revolution worldwide.

As time dragged on without a successful revolution in the West, they were growing more and more desperate. You can see this desperation in their writings: every demonstration, every strike in the West was hailed as a pointer to revolution. The revolution was not a long, or even medium term perspective. It was an ongoing concern. New revolutions in other countries had to happen within a year or two, and the formation of the Third International had to serve this end. They could not wait for the Socialist leaders to turn slowly to revolution; they could not wait for them to be overcome through their failure when in power. They had to be side-stepped; their parties had to be taken from them, *now*.

By the time they realized that the World Revolution was not on the agenda, a lot of damage had been done, as Byrne's narrative shows. They were already committed to the policy of forming new, communist parties in mortal combat with Social Democracy. They were landed with ultra-left policies and ultra-left leaders in a reality that no longer corresponded to a revolutionary period. Lenin's *Left-wing communism, an infantile disorder* is a testimony to that. The game now was not immediate revolution, it was survival until the next revolutionary wave. United Front policies were formulated and the revolution went on

the defensive. The new realities were imposing themselves.

Although one should be careful and not try to read too much in Lenin's 'testament', his desperation at the delay of the world revolution is reaching new heights there. Obviously recognizing the signs of degeneration in the Bolshevik party, he tries to remove Stalin from the position of Secretary General. Puzzlingly, he proposes drastic increases in the number of members of the Central Committee of the Party, specifically asking for the addition of 'workers' to it. Was he naïve enough to expect a change in the balance of the CC in favour of the working class by adding workers to it? My preferred reading of this proposal is to take it in the same spirit as Marx's proposal for the transfer of the seat of the First International to New York.

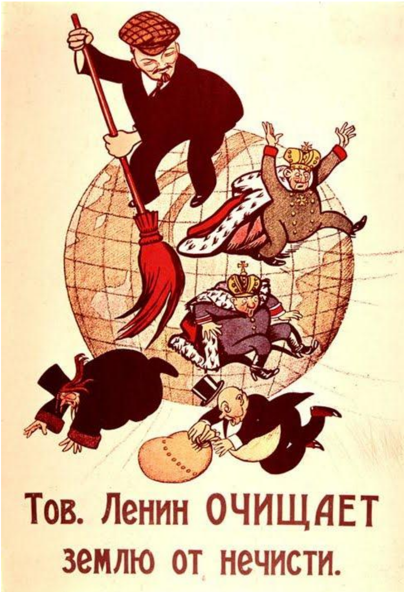
Was Lenin attempting to destroy the Bolshevik party, was he trying to stop the revolutionary party becoming the monstrosity it was to become during the Stalinist years? If he was, he failed in that too. What he started as the beginning of the liberation of mankind turned into the horrors of Stalinism and the dragging of Marxism and revolutionary politics into the mud. One could argue that had the October Revolution never happened, Stalin would not exist and Marxism and revolutionary politics

would in all probability be the dominant ideology in the years after the war and probably lead to World Revolution and Socialism instead of Fascism, Nazism and the Second World War.

But this would be denying Marxism itself, would be denying the possibility of human intervention in the historical process. Lenin and Trotsky identified an opportunity for the working class and they took it. It is this tradition that we decided to follow and it is in this tradition that we should judge their actions and should decide our own. In analyzing any situation we should realize that there is no single truth but myriads of truths depending on the position from which we look at it. Our analysis lays bare not only the situation it describes but also our own point of view.

21 August 2010

TEXT FOUR



THE 'LENINIST THEORY OF ORGANISATION'

I have been following the discussion on the 'Leninist Theory of Organisation' with some interest since it highlights some of the sharpest divisions within the discussion group. I have not taken the step of intervening on this because, quite frankly, I don't consider it a priority subject at this stage of the discussion. As for everything else, the need for a discussion on a subject should be determined by objective needs and not by individual preferences. To paraphrase

Marx,we should set ourselves only such tasks as we are able to solve.

At this stage, I consider it impossible to resolve the organisational question in the way the discussion is attempting to. To start with, it would be wrong to see organisational issues as something fixed and static. Organisational structures should be adjusted to fit objective conditions; they should be forged to enable an organisation to perform efficiently specific tasks. These tasks vary from country to country and, most importantly, from time to time. Marx and Engel's organisational objective when they were writing the Communist Manifesto was to bring together Communists under a common programme. This was different than their objective when they were building the First International where they were seeking to unite the different strands of the worker's movement into a common organisation. Having a separate organisation and being part of the common organisation of the working class were not two mutually exclusive approaches but rather complementary ones. Analytical clarity and unity in action are both necessary for a revolution but not always compatible. The one does not follow from the other; they stand in an uneasy relationship to each other and have to be nurtured carefully to have a successful outcome. That this is not always possible, is

graphically shown by Marx’s transfer of the International’s base to New York.

Lenin was faced with different issues at the turn of the twentieth century. The Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party was a disparate aggregation of various tendencies, mostly Marxist, working under the difficult conditions of Tsarist Russia. There was no central command structure to speak of. Intellectual groups in exile were putting forward ideas, activists both inside Russia and outside were trying to make an impact. The RSDLP was also facing stiff competition from the dominant revolutionary organisation, the Social Revolutionaries, and the anarchists. Work in Russia had of necessity to be clandestine and the danger of infiltration by the police was a very real one. In writing ‘*What is to be done*?’ Lenin was trying to bring together revolutionary activists and create an effective command structure able to withstand the vicissitudes of organisational work in the harsh conditions of Tsarist repression. No wonder he was proposing the creation of a closely knit organisation of dedicated revolutionaries in which decisions would be taken by those directly involved in the party’s work and not by intellectuals associated to the party.

It is in this sense that we should read Lenin’s understanding of the ‘*Vanguard Party*’. Lenin realised that not every worker could dedicate his life to revolution, especially during non-revolutionary times. At the same time, he was not blind to the fact that revolutionary theory was not the direct outcome of workers’ experience. That had to come from *outside* the working class not in the sense that it has to come from the bourgeoisie but from revolutionary intellectuals – be they intellectuals of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois or working class background. Thus, Lenin’s suggestion was not to keep out of the party the majority of the working class but to organise efficiently those revolutionary activists who were ready to commit themselves wholly to the revolution.

Despite the strong language of ‘*What is to be done*?’, Lenin’s suggestion was not an ultimatum and probably he did not expect to get a majority on the famous issue of party membership at the 1903 Congress. Certainly he did not expect and in no way did he engineer a split. His thinking ismade clear in his brilliant ‘*One step forward, two steps back*’. Neither organisational nor political inflexibility was his approach. Within the bounds of fairly broad revolutionary goals and as long as an effective organisation could ensure serious work within the Russian working class, he

would be quite happy to work with the different strands of Russian Marxism.

How far is Lenin's thinking relevant in our case? We should be clear that eventually we shall have to face the whole machinery of the bourgeois state in a final showdown. This is the touchstone for the difference between reformists and revolutionaries. In this sense, a tightly knit disciplined party is as necessaryas ever in revolutionary theory. However, we should be equally clear that this 'tightly knit disciplined party' is a party of the *working class* not a party of a small group of Marxists. It is the working class and not the Marxists that will have to fight the revolution and unless Marxists can lead the working class at the time of revolution it will make no difference how they are organised.

Traditional Leninist and Trotskyist revolution-nary groups have confused the idea of this formation of revolutionary times with Lenin's proposals for the structure of the party under the conditions of Tsarist repression. The discipline needed at a time of revolution is completely different from the discipline needed for clandestine work. It is as different as open war and guerrilla warfare. Their similarities are only incidental.

An even more serious misunderstanding lies in the difference between a mass revolutionary

party and a Marxist group *trying to build* one. Traditional revolutionary wisdom sees the Marxist group as the 'embryo' of the party and tries to impose on the group structures and rules that supposedly should govern the party. However, the dynamics of a mass party are totally different from the dynamics of a small group of intellectuals. The party is firmly rooted in society, it has the everyday check of its working class rank and file. Democratic or not, Stalinist or Social Democratic, reformist or revolutionary, the leadership of a mass party has to take into account the feelings of the class. The fact that repressive structures and manipulative methods have been developed to trick the membership of working class parties, does not disprove this. On the contrary is an indication of its potency.

In contrast, a small group of intellectuals has no such constraints. It can plod along creating its own sophisticated view of the world irrespective of whether this view has anything in common with reality. Its actions have no real impact on politics and can be happily disregarded by everybody else without this having a direct feedback on the group's policies. In these conditions, centralism and strict discipline are the best ingredients for a bureaucratic recipe. And, while they may be necessary in conditions of clandestine work, they are suffocating in conditions that neither

lives are at stake nor the future of humanity will depend on a few mistakes.

Yet, we have seen much too many a revolutionary organisation resort to expulsions, slander and character assassination in processes that had more to do with personal antagonisms than theoretical significance. We witnessed split after split on issues that can hardly affect the development of revolution or even the revolutionary group. Contrast this with Lenin’s behaviour towards Trotsky or Lunacharsky or Kamenev and Zinoviev. Contrast this with the actions of Bucharin and Kollondai in 1918 and the tolerant attitude of the Bolsheviks at the time. Even the harshest of criticisms did not overstep the understandding of everybody that they were comrades, bound together by their common aims.

It is these general principles that have relevance today. A common revolutionary goal and an effective organisational structure to achieve it are the necessary preconditions for success. I can hardly think of anybody in this discussion list that disagrees with that. Of course, this ‘effective organisational structure’ might be understood in different ways and needs to be discussed and, at some stage, agreed on. But it is pointless to attempt such an agreement now. A discussion on the topic at this stage could only be fruitful in raising

the issues, not resolving them. The reason for this is that we do not yet have a common objective, a well-defined goal for the sake of which to organise.

Which then should be the priorities of this discussion? I believe that political issues should take precedence while organisational matters can be left to those who will decide that there is enough convergence to attempt the creation of a common organisation. I am fully aware that organisational questions cannot be divorced from political ones – some would say that they are themselves essentially political. Nevertheless, they can only make sense within the context of a common political perspective, something we are not yet sure we have.

Having said that, I don't want to duck the organisational question. In our local case, we work as a small organisation, more or less on the basis of democratic centralism – admittedly of a very liberal interpretation. The specifics of this mode of work have undergone extensive modifications according to changing situations and the increasing experience of the organisation. We are not quite satisfied with our performance and we are still trying to increase our organisational efficiency. However, we always believed in democratic centralist principles and the need for an independent

organisation as a base for our work in the wider political context. At the same time we never tried to isolate our members from ‘bourgeois ideology’. In fact, we always considered that exposure to this ideology was the best way to inoculate them against it. In the process, we lost a few comrades to it, probably as many as we lost to ultra-leftism, but this is unavoidable. On the plus side of this approach is that the comrades are able to keep in contact with what’s going on ‘out there’, keep in contact with reality. Also, a lot of new ideas can be found in texts otherwise full of bourgeois prejudices.

This does not mean that we would favour a democratic centralist International at this stage. An International should be an International of mass organisations, not an International of sects. A revolutionary organisation’s overriding loyalty should be to the working class, it should never be to a conglomerate of intellectuals that could easily degenerate into a bureaucratic directorate. Experience shows that whenever the building of an international was attempted on the basis of joining together small national revolutionary groups, a dominant group or even a dominant individual ended calling all the shots without regard to the needs of the local situation. As has been explained above, it is all too easy for a small group to create a self-consistent theoretical

bubble, which nonetheless has no relation to social reality, in which to exist. We have far too often seen situations where instead of making theory fit reality, reality is bent in order to fit the theory.

In conclusion, I would argue that the first task of national groups at this stage is to grow into organisations that are in a position to have a serious political impact on national politics. At the present stage, an International (Marxist) organisation can be extremely useful as network for the exchange of ideas, discussion of theory and formulation of policies. It is of little importance if we disagree on various issues. It is much more important if we make sure that issues are discussed, different approaches put forward and everybody is aware of what everybody else thinks. Such an organisation could also be a forum for the dissemination of information and the building of solidarity on various issues. It would however be a mistake to try to turn it into a fighting force prematurely. That should be reserved for the mass organisations of the working class.

9 January 2011

THE FIFTH DOCUMENT



THE GREEK CRISIS AND WORK IN PASOK

It is not clear for me if the documents from Greece have been circulated for comment or just for information. I do not have all the facts and I would be very reluctant to criticize fighters in the field. Nevertheless, these documents do raise important questions that have to be discussed if for nothing else to clear what we mean by 'orientation towards the working class organisations'. Now, at a safe distance from the actual events, I feel that we can do that without the danger of wasting

valuable fighting time in non-essential discussion[1].

The events in Greece clearly have a revolutionary flavour. The working class was out in the streets fighting against the Socialist Government's austerity package – one of the most severe austerity packages ever seen. Even 'New Democracy', the main bourgeois party, is distancing itself from these measures and focuses on the need for 'social cohesion', a euphemism for reforms aimed at placating the working class.

The two parties to the left of Pasok, Syriza and the Communist Party, while very vocal in condemning Pasok, failed to articulate a convincing programme of action. As a result, despite widespread opposition to the measures and extensive disenchantment with Pasok, George Papandreou and his government still retain considerable support and they are given a period of grace to try their remedies for an

[1] This should not be misunderstood. Had we been in closer contact and more information were exchanged about the situation in Greece, both the comrades in Greece should seek our view and our ideas, if possible before going into action, and we should respond promptly to that. As things stand, with minimal information about the situation, external intervention could do more harm than good.

ailment that is clearly seen not to be of their making.

From the documents one gathers that a total war on the government of George Papandreou is the chosen path of the Greek comrades. That would be justified if there was a possibility of winning that war. However, it is doubtful that this is even remotely realistic at this stage. If Papandreou is defeated, he will not be defeated by us, or even by the parties of the left. He will be defeated by 'New Democracy' and Samaras, who would probably turn to high pitch nationalism and war mongering, if not by Laos and Karadjaferis, the equivalent of France's Lepen.

LOYALTY

Let's see some quotes from the documents

> *The war of the Government the EU and the IMF against the workers and pensioners continues and intensifies*

The problem here is that *the Government* is the government of Pasok, *our* government. Before we mark it as our enemy in a war, we must join the army against it. We cannot pretend that we are part of Pasok and join its enemies. It just will not do. Nobody will see us as anything more than infiltrators intent on destroying Pasok.

Of course we have a problem. We have to side with the masses, we have to explain our position and our disagreement with the Pasok leadership. But as long as we don't leave Pasok, as long as we don't have the strength to either capture Pasok or form a mass revolutionary party, we remain loyal. We criticize the leadership for choosing a suicidal course for the Party, we propose the programme Pasok should be implementing – but remain loyal. Our fight does not –yet anyway– by-pass Pasok; it is focused on building a left tendency in Pasok and eventually contesting the leadership. We use the present mobilizations not to promote revolution now, because this is not possible yet. We use them not to educate the working class in the abstract but to reach the working class organized in Pasok, the cadres we target for future leaders in Pasok.

DEMANDS

– *GESEE and ADEDY should organize a continuing mobilization*

– *Until the measures against the workers are withdrawn*

– *Until the debts and the shortfalls are paid back by the banks and the capital owners*

– *Until all that was stolen is given back*

– *Until everybody who plundered the state finances are thrown to jail*

The idea of 'continuing mobilisation' is an important demand and could certainly form the core of our work in the trade unions. Nevertheless, we should be careful on how we put forward this demand. First, we should be clear what this demand means. I take it that it does not mean 'stay out until we succeed', which would be clearly adventurist. I take it to mean that GESEE and ADEDY should organize a programme of mobilisations (strikes, demonstrations, lectures, discussions etc.).

We should see it as a *medium term* demand, a demand that would produce its full effect in our work in the months to come, not immediately. As such, at the time of the general strike, it should only be put forward as *one* of the demands – if at all. What should be more carefully drafted is a set of transitional demands that would make the strikers feel that it is possible to win, that it is possible to navigate out of the impasse that Greece finds itself, that the situation is presented as impossible only because of the timidity of the Government in the face of EU and IMF demands.

The problem with the above demands is that they offer no way out. Their logic is '*they* are responsible to take the decisions, *they* should do all these, *we* don't care how *they* are going

to manage to do it'. It would be easy for Pasok leaders to present us as irresponsible. Workers can easily see that Papandreou had no choice but to manage, as best he could, a bad situation not of his making, a situation inherited from the Karamanlis Government and exacerbated by the world economic crisis.

How should we formulate our demands? We should first ask ourselves what the workers are out for. What is their objective in taking the decision to come out in the streets and demonstrate their anger. Of course they don't want to lose their jobs, of course they are not thrilled by the cuts in their wages. But they are not either selfish or unreasonable. What they want is policies that would make the above possible. That is where we start. That is where our demands should link the objective needs of the workers with our transitional programme.

What should these demands be? That should flow from our analysis of the Greek situation and also the more general European perspectives. But even now, without such analysis formally present, we should use our brains and give answers to the questions posed by the situation – even if in a rudimentary and preliminary fashion. At such a time of mobilezation of the masses, it is much better to give

a wrong programme than not to give one at all[2].

A possible list of demands could be:

– *Papandreou should reject the EU/IMF blackmail.*
– *A state of emergency should be declared.*
– *Banks should be nationalized to insure the flow of money into the economy.*
– *Big factories laying off a significant number of workers should be nationalized and be run by their workers*
– *Papandreou should call for help from the Socialist Parties of Europe and the European workers in general.*
– *All incomes below €0000 should not be touched.*
– *No cuts in pensions, no cuts in welfare benefits.*

---

[2] In any case, we cannot be that far off the mark. We have a more or less correct analysis in general, we are experienced enough not to make a serious blunder. Above all, it is unlikely that at this stage our analysis and our demands would lead to a major catastrophe for the working class. At worst, we would be forced to amend our position.

On the other hand, if we fail to show a way out, not only do we miss a rare opportunity to claim the position of serious leaders in the struggle but we shall be seen by the workers to be ineffective and sulky.

– *All those who plundered the state should be jailed.*

This is equivalent to asking for revolution. What makes it possible to put forward such demands without being seen as dogmatic nutcases is that in the specific situation of Greece, at the specific time, they would seem reasonable. More than that, they make sense even in capitalist terms – in the short term. In the long term they undermine capitalism in the same way that nationalization of the banks in 2008 did.

Had we put forward such a bundle of demands[3] we would have presented ourselves as a responsible group which has both the ability to offer solutions and the determination to fight for the workers. At the same time we would be seen as members of Pasok, loyal to the party, who see a way out for Papandreou. It is important that we do not bundle Papandreou with the EU and the IMF: our implied criticism of Papandreou should be

[3] The specific bundle is not important. The demands proposed may not be the optimum for the situation and some of them could be quite wrong. What is important is that the bundle has a logic that would show possibilities for extricating Greece from the need to crush the living standards of the poorest of its citizens. More, it proposes a vehicle for their implementation and a way for us to work towards achieving it.

that he does not have the tenacity to chart a way out, he does not have the boldness to challenge the capitalists. We are not yet ready to challenge his authority, we are not yet ready to replace him. Having that in mind, we are loyal to him because he is the leader of Pasok, he embodies the hopes of the workers of Pasok. More, this loyalty is real, we are not faking it in order to 'expose' him. The demands we are putting forward could be implemented by him. In fact, his father would in all probability have implemented them himself in a similar situation. It is up to the son to rise to the occasion.

APPROACHING THE MEMBERS OF PASOK

The workers in general and especially those who voted for Pasok are full of anger and rage for their deception by the leadership of Pasok and George Papandreou himself. He promised extensive reforms and instead he implements the worst counter-reforms that were ever implemented in recent history! The Government of Pasok is again trying to fool the workers telling them that they are being sacrificed in order to save the fatherland from bankruptcy.

This is not the language for approaching workers in Pasok. It is a call to leave Pasok, it is a call to bring down the Government, *our*

Government. We should understand that this is not an analytical document, it is not a contribution to a theoretical discussion. It is an agitational document, it will be taken by the reader as is, we shall not be given the opportunity to explain or clarify our position. An agitational document should be self-contained, succinct and clear. It should be a distillation of our policy for the occasion and should avoid unnecessarily offensive language.

As it stands, the above phraseology suffers on two levels. The one is on the question of loyalty to the party we have already discussed. The second, and perhaps more important, is that it belies an inherent pessimism, a belief that nothing can be done: if the Pasok leadership, if a Socialist Government that came to power with such a decisive majority, is siding with the enemy, there is little else to offer hope. And, at the time of mobilization, there is nothing more demoralizing than pessimism. Despair replaces hope, and people in despair go home – they don't join the revolution.

AN ALTERNATIVE POLICY

In opposition to the criminal policy of the Government, which has become nothing more than a servant of the EU and the IMF, we propose a wholly realistic programme that

transfers the burden of the crisis of debt and budget deficits from the workers, the pensioners and the unprivileged to the banks, businesses and capital owners.

Supposing that we did have such a programme, who do we expect to implement it? Unless we offer, in addition to the programme, a credible route to its implementation it will just hang in the air, an ineffective rumbling of impotent people. At best, the workers will say 'they are right, these are good ideas, pity they cannot be implemented'.

Having closed the door for the possibility of the Papandreou Government implementing such a programme, we are left with no credible alternative, no route of action that would lead to its implementation. Pasok and its leadership have already been bundled with the enemy, we are too weak to be taken seriously as a challenge to the establishment, the Unions are not given an independent role in the power game.

But we do not even have a programme. What follows in the document is a list of assertions as to where money could be found. The list contains some important truths but it is not a coherent programme for financial salvation. Some of the items could seriously help the situation, some are problematic in their

implementation and some are outright wrong. Take for example the taxing of the banks:

> *Money can be found:*
>
> *In the hundreds of billions of profits of banks in the last decade that have been taxed at a rate of 10% only and must immediately be raised to 45 and 50% at least.*

Taxing the profits of the banks now will not bring any money into the state coffers. There are simply no bank profits of any significance now. And there is no possibility to tax past profits which in any case were probably profits on paper.

Moreover, taxing the banks would make them even less able to contribute to the well-being of the economy and makes much less sense today, even in a capitalist setting, than the nationalization of the banks. It is suicidal to cringe back from a full-programme demand and replace it with a half-hearted catastrophic demand that would lead nowhere.

Nearly all of the suggestions as to where money can be found are phrased as propagandist statements, not as serious suggestions. The workers will not miss that. They may applaud us for calling a spade a spade, but they will not take us seriously.

THE CREATION OF A '*LEFT SOCIALIST WING IN PASOK AND PASKE*'

The document is followed by a (separate?) declaration by an 'initiative committee for the creation of a '*Left Socialist Wing in Pasok and Paske*'. It is not clear whether this 'initiative' is a spontaneous result of the situation among the Paske trade unions or instigated by our group. Either way, I take it that the comrades are involved in it and have an influential role there.

The declaration is somewhat better than the main document, in the sense that it proposes specific steps on the way of implementing policies (Congress of Paske, Gsee and Adedy, elections at branch level of Paske, Congress of Pasok, the production of a Paske monthly bulletin). However, it suffers from the same lack of identification with Pasok and Paske as the main document. And the call for the creation of a 'Left Socialist Wing in Pasok and Paske' sounds like a hostile move, not as a sincere proposal with the aim correcting party policies and bringing it back to its socialist roots.

The emergence of a left wing tendency is not a matter of a decision. It is an objective fact, a reality born out of the objective situation. Once the conditions are there, our task is not to *call for the creation* a 'mass left-socialist

tendency', it is just to help give it an organizational structure and an ideological substance. The call should never be 'come to create a left-socialist tendency', it should be a call to all left-socialists in Pasok to organize in order to transform Pasok into a real socialist party, to bring it back to its socialist roots.

All this may sound pedantic, but it's not. It can make the difference between a sect and a genuinely integral tendency in the labour movement. It is not just a question of how we phrase things, it is how we think and feel that matters. Expression inevitably follows our inner feelings, the way we think and function. And workers are not as insensitive as intellectuals tend to think. They can sense what is behind a text – and react accordingly.

THE NEED FOR A FOLLOW-UP

The above should not be taken as interference in the work of the Greek comrades. In any case the specific facts surrounding their work may be such that they render this criticism irrelevant. If this is the case, I would be the first to acknowledge my error. My comments are based on what little knowledge I have about the Greek situation. The weakness of this knowledge is mainly the lack of information in the form of a report by the Greek comrades about the way they work,

their analysis of the situation, their perspectives and aims.

Situations like Greece do not arise every day. Our intervention in these situations should be valued not only as a contribution to the struggle of the working class but also as an educational process for ourselves and our cadres. I can understand that economies of time may prevent us from filing detailed report of our actions, successes and failures during the high tide of mobilisations. This should not prevent us from having such a report today. The lessons to be learned from Greece today and from other places tomorrow will be invaluable.

What should such a report consist of? Of course that would depend on the actual facts, but some general points could include:

– *A general description of the situation. The austerity measures and the reaction of the people in general and the workers in particular. The position of the political parties and the fringe organisations. Our analysis of the situation.*

– *Our organization and the deployment of our forces. Our contacts and our wider influence. Our relationship with Pasok and Paske and our work there.*

– *A description of the mobilisations. The decision for a general strike. The response of the*

workers. Factions and splits. The anarchists, the KKE and Syriza. The response from Pasok and Paske. Police and the state. The containment of the movement.

- *Our intervention. How we operated, who did we contact, who did we mobilise. How did we draft the documents, how did we distribute them. What was the response to these documents.*
- *What is the situation today. How is the 'initiative' progressing? How many people signed the declaration? What are we planning to do with them?*
- *Did we gain any contacts from our work? Did we win any new members? Did we increase our influence?*
- *Were there mistakes in our work? Were there missed opportunities? Could these mistakes be avoided?*
- *What does the future hold? How can we prepare for tomorrow? What actions should be taken today?*

The above is not either a necessary or an exhaustive list of a report. What is necessary though, is a report in sufficient detail so that everybody gets the benefit of a genuine experience of working class mobilization, an experience that will be invaluable in the future battles we will be called to fight.

2 August 2010

THE 1992 DOCUMENT



THE PRESENT CONTIDIONS IN THE WORLD AND IN CYPRUS

INTRODUCTION

In August 1991 the tanks of the Red Army entered Moscow in an attempt to put an end to the process of reforms and impose again the iron hill of the conservatives. Gorbachev was kept in the countryside as a hostage while resistance against the coup was sporadic. As the whole world was expecting that the Soviet Union would return buck to a Stalinist dictatorship, the spineless leadership of the coup collapsed in the face of the first difficult-

ties and the theatrical antics of Yeltsin. In three days the reformers had won and the road to capitalism was resumed at a dramatically faster pace.

The August coup was the peak of the bigger drama of the collapse of Stalinism which begun with the death of Brezhniev. In a timid and hesitant way at the beginning, part of the soviet bureaucracy tried to pull the country out of the impasse of the economic and social stagnation by small reforms: a little more freedom, a little more transparency, a little more prosecution of corruption and incompetence in the state structure. The words *glasnost* and *perestroika* entered the everyday vocabulary of world politics.

The system though could not be mended by small reforms. Bureaucracy itself was a barrier to development and progress; bureaucracy itself was the reason for stagnation. The petty reforms of Gorbatchov succeeded only in letting out the winds of Aeolus and threw the Soviet Union and the rest of the Stalinist world in the whirlwind of instability and collapse. The bureaucracies of Eastern Europe, being deprived of the protection of the soviet bureaucracy, were overthrown in a couple of months. The degeneration of these regimes was such that nothing could keep them alive.

The collapse of Stalinism was a historical necessity. Trotsky had identified the temporary character of Stalinism since the 1920s. In *Revolution Betrayed* he provides two perspectives for the Soviet Union: either the working class will overthrowthe bureaucracy and impose its rule or the counter revolution will prevail and the Soviet Union will return back to capitalism. Despite the fact that historical coincidence altered the time-frame of the prediction drastically, and extended the life of the bureaucracy considerably, the essence remains the same. The Soviet Bureaucracy was a temporary regime awaiting its overthrow.

Despite the important role played by the working class in overthrowing the Stalinist regimes, victory did not lead to working class power. The comparatively better economic and social condition of the capitalist world, oriented the consciousness of the masses to the vision of a better, capitalist future. Socialism was associated with bureaucratic oppression, freedom and democracy was associated with market forces. The working class was not able to acquire its own organisational consciousness and, paraphrasing Marx, was fighting the enemies of its enemies, every victory was a victory for capitalism.

In the long run the collapse of Stalinism will give a new impetus to the class struggle. The

struggle of the working class will be waged without the burden of the Stalinist degeneration. Socialism will not be associated with the Soviet aberration; it will again become the vision of millions of workers for a world without coercion and the humiliation of the selling of labour power.

For the time being though the collapse of Stalinism has led to an unprecedented setback of the consciousness of the working class. Marxism, Leninism, communism, even sociallism, have become synonymous with oppression and corruption. The capitalist society and the market are glorified and associated with democracy and freedom. The subjugation of man to the blind compulsion of the economic mechanisms was baptised as "*freedom*", the conscious intervention of society became a sacrilege.

The organised forces of the working class are almost everywhere in retreat. The working class unions lose their power both in numbers and influence. The working class parties turn to the right. In the USA the conditions are so hopeless that the masses turn to desperate explosions like the case of Loss Angeles or the support of Pero. In Europe there is a dangerous advancement of xenophobia and Nazism. The working class is not in a position today to lead the struggle against the capitalist

deadlock; it is still stunned from the collapse of Stalinism.

Capitalism today seems to have unlimited potential for development. The return of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to world capitalism offers huge new markets and a workforce with high education and ability. The development of technology during the last decade has laid the basis for a development of production without precedence. And the unquestionable superiority of the USA gives comfort to the fears of the capitalists in relation to revolutions and upheavals in the third world countries.

These phenomena, however, are just part of the truth. Behind the optimistic picture of the capitalist propaganda, none of the problems of capitalism has been solved. At this moment capitalism lives probably under the most prolonged recession since the 1929 crash. Poverty and unemployment have become a permanent feature of the advanced capitalist countries, hunger and instability are still the scourge of the third world. In the countries of Eastern Europe and the republics that once constituted the Soviet Union, economic development still is nothing but a distant dream. The '*new order*' proves to be still a chimera despite the military omnipotence of

America and its cynical display at the gulf war.

The capitalist contradictions are not to be found in the future. At the present level of development of the means of production, private ownership and the national state constitute a blatant anachronism. The disappearance of antagonism from the Soviet Union offers very limited breathing space to capitalism. The objective situation imposes itself mercilessly over the propaganda of the bourgeoisie; a new period of turmoil will follow the short respite. The inability of controlling the situation in the Balkans, the difficulties in the processes towards a United Europe, the instability in the Middle East, are a testimony of events in the coming years. Nowhere has capitalism been able to solve any problem. Everywhere the optimism of yesterday gives its place to the scepticism of today and the conflict of tomorrow.

Under these conditions the working class starts slowly healing its wounds and regrouping. Its rear-guard battles to hold the attack of the bourgeoisie begins to give way to the first offensive battles of a new era. The working class organizations which are under retreat today will start being rebuilt again on a new basis and new perspectives. At the beginning the battles will unavoidably be

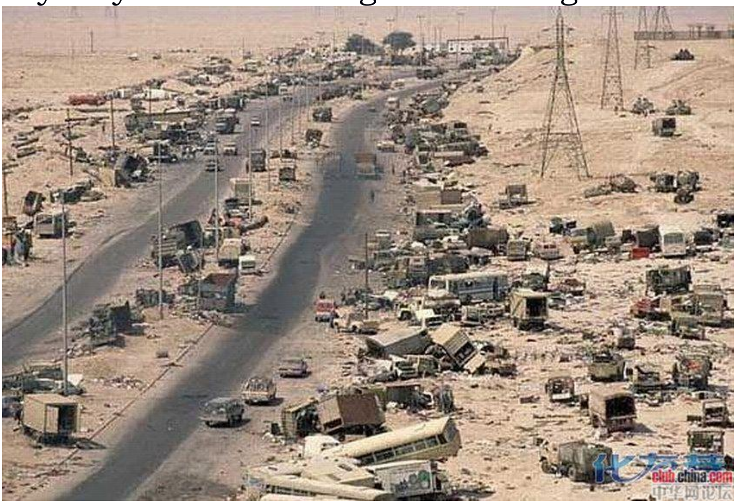
limited in battles for better life within the framework of capitalism. Very soon though, it will become clear that this is not possible. The perspective of revolution and socialism will again enter the agenda of the day. The working class will look again for the ideas of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. In the new battles the working class will find again the theory that will put revolution and communism in the agenda of history.

ADVANCED CAPITALISM

The collapse of Stalinism left the USA as the sole undisputed power on the planet. This is the position they tried to confirm and consolidate by waging the war in the gulf. The invasion of Saddam in Kuwait was an act of transgression of their jurisdiction, a dangerous move against the Americans' proxy in Kuwait, which could not be left unanswered. The overthrow of the Sheikh of Kuwait constituted a bad precedent for the other Sheikhs of the area and the Kings of Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The imposition of American will was a necessity.

But it was not just the imposition of the American will that was at stake. USA did everything possibleto make it clear to even the most slow-witted that their will is the Law everywhere on earth. They used the United

Nations in the most cynical way, without making an effort to hold onto appearances. On the contrary, they did everything possible to paint the picture that the one who gives orders is the USA, UN and the rest of the world just sign and follow. Europe, Japan and anybody else dreaming of resisting the USA



and their absolute dominance should take heed of this lesson. Every oppressed soul should stop hoping that there was a way out on the basis of its own strength, should depend only on the magnanimity of USA for protection and prosperity.

The American omnipotence is not a marginal phenomenon in global capitalism. In the ruins that the second world war left behind it and under the threat of a total eclipse of capitalism, the bourgeoisies of all countries

sought their salvation in the protection of USA. The protection that America offered meant at the same time its absolute hegemony. Any doubts about this reality were wiped out by the fiasco of the Anglo-French intervention in Suez.

During the whole period of the cold war any challenge to US dominance came exclusively from outside the capitalist structures: the Soviet Union, the colonial revolutions and the movement of the working class within the capitalist states. This challenge scored a number of victories and could have led to the overthrow of capitalism worldwide if it did not lack revolutionary perspectives, if the Stalinist bureaucracy did not do everything in its power to prevent the unfolding of a world revolutionary dynamic. In this logic, any third world revolution was pushed by the Soviet Bureaucracy to restrict its self within the framework of capitalism (Egypt, Chile etc.) any insurrection in the advanced countries was led to defeat (France 1968) any conflict with America to compromise (Cuba). The interests of the Soviet bureaucracy required its hegemony to take precedence to the struggle against capitalism.

The Vietnam War provided a new dimension to the USA challenge. This, the only defeat in their history and showed that its military

machine was not invulnerable. It showed that their ability to protect their allies was questionable. The feeling of safety which was acquired with so much effort after containing the 'communist threat' and because of the unprecedented post-war growth, gave its place to anxiety and uncertainty. It is not an accident that the Vietnam defeat was followed by the first post war economic recession in 1973-74, which in turn aggravated even further the lack of confidence in the ability of capitalism to solve its problems.

Capitalism has passed the stage in which itcould overcome crises through its internal dynamics. The development of the gigantic monopolies on a world scale has left the era of competitive capitalism behind. Free competition is restricted more and more to sectors which can influence social development less and less. Control of production and consequently of power, is restricted among some hundreds of companies in each country. On a world scale a very limited number of units outside America, Japan and Europe have any importance. Under these conditions capitalism doesn't possess the balancing mechanism it possessed in the past. The conflict of interests leads to serious destabilizations that only drastic, corrective action can prevent. The existence of an unquestioned leading power is necessary for something like this. It

is ironic that the threat ofthe Soviet Union pushed the bourgeoisie of the west to rally around the USA, thus providing the necessary stabilizing factor for the development of capitalism.

The Vietnam War left the leading capitalist power humiliated and unable to impose its leadership effectively. It took the bankruptcy of liberalism (Carter) of Social Democracy (Mitterrand, Gonzales, Papandreou) and Stalinism as well as the extended "neo liberal" Thatcher-Reagan governance, with all its cynicism and wars, for capitalism to regain even a superficial stability. A stability that is now at its peak with the collapse of Stalinism and the so much heralded American omnipotence.

However, the present American omnipotence is not based on solid foundations. Decades of deficits in foreign trade have transformed America from the greater lender to the greater debtor. Real incomes of most of Americans are in decline and there is a continuous fall in the level of education. The problem of poverty, instead of being solved, becomes more acute, the war against drugs is being lost. The American economy is in the longest post-war recession.

At the level of foreign policy perspectives are not much better. The collapse of Stalinism

and the war in the gulf did not lead to a '*new order*' as the Americans expected. Capitalism has not been able to provide the solutions it promised to any of the countries of Eastern Europe and even less to the republics of the Soviet Union. The civil war in Yugoslavia leaves the USA in the position of a mere observer, unable to intervene. The questions of Palestine and Cyprus seem to be unsolvable problems despite the efforts for their solution. In North Africa the hopes for an avoidance of a war between the whites and blacks are diminishing by the day while at the same time hunger in East Africa doesn't seem to recede. Even the war in the Gulf , whose aim was to display American omnipotence in a conclusive way and delete the memories of the defeat in Vietnam, was so short and had such disappointing results that it is already being erased from the consciousness of the world. The challenge to America will start again to acquire dangerous proportions in the following years.

However, this challenge will not come, for now at least, from the other two economic giants of capitalism, Europe or Japan. World capitalism is today more unified than ever before, the fate of capitalists is inextricably linked together. And the military inequality between America and the rest is still so great that it is unreasonable to expect its substitution by any other power. The challenge will come at

another level, the level of the masses. A challenge that will, at the same time, be a challenge to capitalism. Today we have evidence of this controversy that in a situation of lack of working class guidance takes reactionary forms: Islamism, nationalism, racism and neo-Nazism are a sign of the impasse of the system and the lack of an alternative way out.

The process to United Europe has already lost a great deal of its momentum. The rejection of the Maastricht treaty by the Danish referendum, the narrow victory at the French referendum and the turmoil in the monetary system show how the atmosphere has changed from the year that *Unite Europe* won the Eurovision song contest, the year of ecstatic excitement at the vision of a United Europe. It is doubtful today whether the majority of the European masses believe in this vision. In any case, whatever the level of this belief is at present, it is continuously declining.

Even Japan passes through some difficult days. It is the first time that the growth rates of the economy are so low. At the same time USA exerts press for measures that will reverse the huge surpluses of Japan, something that will clearly have serious implications. Competition from other countries in the Far East (Korea, Taiwan etc.) is becoming a

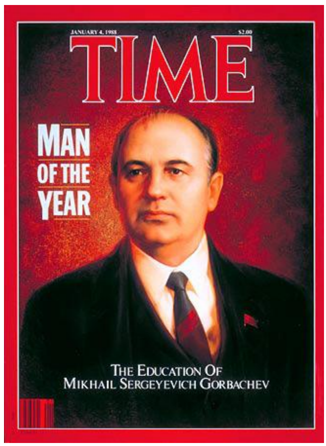
serious threat. Political and financial scandals follow one another without hope on the horizon for an end to corruption.

It is in this climate that the world working class will move in the next period. While the crises of capitalism will become deeper and more threatening, the working class will begin to rebuild its organized forces and fight its battles. It will start learning the truths of capitalism and grope towards revolutionary conclusions. Marxism is at the end of this process.

However, the process of building the forces of the working class on a revolutionary basis is neither easy nor of short duration. Its present organizations, social democratic in their majority, have turned so much to the right, have accepted the permanence of capitalism in such an absolute way, that it will take many events for a change in direction. This will take place painfully, through internal conflicts that will determine the orientation of these organisations. The forces of Marxism have an important role to play in these conflicts. If they are able to guide the forces of the left, it is possible to build mass revolutionary parties through the old organisations. If they fail, the organisations of the working class will continue playing the reactionary role we got used to during the previous period.

The Marxist forces are today very weak. The difficult objective conditions which led to the shrinking of power and influence of the labour unions, led to a crisis of the revolutionary nuclei of the International. The false time-tables led to an intense activism which resulted in in the neglect of theory and the bureaucratic degeneration of the organization. The split was the unavoidable result of the lack of live democratic functioning which is a necessary prerequisite for the timely detection and correction of mistakes. The building of the Marxist forces today must take place on a new collective basis accompanied by a detailed discussion of perspectives and organizational requirements. Impatience under any excuse will again result in problems.

RUSSIA AND EASTERN EUROPE



The civil war in Yugoslavia exposes, in their most extreme form, the results of the collapse of Stalinism at a time when the working class was not ready to take power. The violent confrontation between peoples who had lived

peacefully together for half a century shows the absolute bankruptcy of Stalinism on one hand and the inability of capitalism to solve the problems of ex-Stalinist states on the other.

With the exception of the Albanian-speaking people in Kosovo, there is no history of national oppression in Yugoslavia similar to what existed in the Soviet Union. Despite its numerical superiority, Serbia never had the position of the leading nationality as in the case of Russia. Slovenia and Croatia were in general richer and more advanced; Bosnia-Herzegovina was never a poor relative of Serbia. Poor Macedonia was happy to provide, under the protection of Yugoslavia, a homeland to the Macedonians who were harshly persecuted by the Greeks and the Bulgarians in the most intense implementation of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. Even in Kosovo, the Albanian speaking people were not really in a worse position than their fellow Albanians in neighbouring Albania, this extreme case of bureaucratic degeneration of socialism.

Nevertheless, the Yugoslavian bureaucracies did not do any better than the rest of the bureaucracies of Eastern Europe. It constituted an ever increasing burden for the economy of the country, a burden that became

a barrier for the development of the productive forces. Its collapse left a vacuum, filling which means passing through civil war, national segregation and ethnic cleansing. The road to capitalism is long and painful, and it is doubtful if it will ever be completed.

The same prospects are in store for the republics of the Soviet Union. Already there are outbreaks of civil war which seem difficult to control. Russia managed up to now with only limited involvement in these conflicts but it is doubtful if it can really stay out of them. Already the inability of the capitalist reforms to offer any improvement in the lives of peoples that formed the Soviet Union, leads Russia to separatist tendencies from an ever increasing number of nationalities on the one hand, and to an increasing tendency towards authoritarianism on the other. Yeltsin is being turning into a Bonaparte of the capitalist restoration, hardly less authoritarian than the would-be coup leaders of 1991.

The national question is probably the most complicated question which the ex-soviet republics have to deal with. 70 years of working class power has not been able to eliminate national differences and religious prejudices. That could only happen in conditions of democracy and freedom. The Stalinist degeneration of the workers' state,

the autocratic governance and the corruption of the bureaucracy led to national oppression and fostered national and religious hatred of the peoples against their oppressors. The only power that could unify this hatred and transform it into a creative force was the working class: but the running of the state by the Stalinists *on behalf* of the working class did not leave space for an organization with revolutionary perspectives. Stalinism was overthrown by the counter-revolution, leading to the path towards capitalism. In this path, the national question is unsolvable; it leads to conflict and fragmentation.

The victory of counter-revolution did not solve any problems. The road to capitalism is very slow and full of difficulties. The initial optimistic predictions for a massive inflow of foreign capital give their place to pessimism and disappointment. The working masses who believed in a capitalist paradise start having their doubts. The change in the consciousness of the masses is beginning to be felt: originally as disappointment and fatalism, then as organization and action. But this process will take time and is fraught with danger. The disappointment of the masses cannot be easily redirected to revolutionary action. There are on offer reactionary solutions at request. The price to be paid for the failure of the working class to overthrow

Stalinism and seize power is the resurgence of nationalism, religious fanaticism, racism and neo-Nazism.

It is however unlikely that these types of reactionary solutions will prevail, for the time being at least. Despite its weakness and lack of organization, the working class has not as yet said its final word. It has not yet been defeated in a direct confrontation; it has not yet tested its forces. Despite these disturbing events the conditions that have the potential to lead it to regroup its forces and oppose the process to capitalist restoration are there.

Even the possibility of Stalinist resurgence cannot be ruled out. This is of course impossible in the immediate future. The more though the autocratic governance intensifies, the more often the army is used to suppress insurrections, the more likely a military intervention becomes.

Similar processes are observed in all countries of Eastern Europe. Each one of course has its own peculiarities, but we observe the same general process in each one of them: the collapse of Stalinism leads to a more or less prolonged process leading to capitalism, suffering and difficulties. The working class is left without organization and perspectives, without being able for the time being to articulate its own programme. Only through

hard experience will the working class be able to re-form itself into a fighting force.

A few words about the countries which still maintain a Stalinist bureaucracy: China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea. Each one of them has its own peculiarities, its own reason for its resilience. In Vietnam and China the bureaucracy seems to continue playing a relatively progressive role while in Cuba the revolutionary tradition is still alive in peoples' consciousness. On the contrary, North Korea seems to still hold on only due to its extreme isolation from the rest of the world. Of course nowhere is the bureaucracy everlasting: it is a temporary regime that sooner or later will give its place to the capitalist counter revolution or to the power of the working class – but this will depend to a great extent on developments in the rest of the world.

THE REALITIES OF THE THIRD WORLD

At a time when capitalism enjoyed a prolonged period of relative development and improvement in living standards, poverty and hunger remained the everyday reality in the Third World. Starvation in Ethiopia and Somalia are only the extreme cases of a situation that prevails allover these countries.

The whole of Africa is in a state of permanent crisis. In addition to Ethiopia and Somalia, famine is also threatening Kenya, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. In West Africa instability and civil war are endemic. Angola, despite the victory of MPLA at the elections, doesn't seem as if it is entering a period of peace, while a number of serious of army mutinies took place in Zaire this year.

The substitution of military regimes by 'democratic' ones in Latin America has not put end the misery in the life of millions of people. Children living in dumps, children living on



prostitution and crime, drug industries with capital larger than the budgets of their countries, governmentsof corruption and anything but prosperity is what Latin

American capitalism offers to the people of the area.

The Indian Peninsula and the Far East are not better off. With the exception of some very special cases (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore), poverty and turmoil are endemic. Separatist movements threaten to fragment countries like India, with dire consequences for its people.

For the third world the development of capitalism has offered absolutely nothing. Experiments in the adoption of western style democratic regimes always ended up in military interventions, dictatorships or ridiculous parodies of democracy as in Nigeria. Efforts to establish single party regimes and versions of the Stalinist model did not fare any better. It is impossible for development to take place in these countries within the framework of a world market that is dominated by a handful of developed imperialist countries.

The picture of the third world is almost always the same: huge foreign debt that is impossible to be repaid, regimes that are almost always corrupt and depended on the west and violent suppression of any effort to change this situation.

The only way out for these countries still remains dealing with the situation on a world

scale. The working class is forced to seize power much before the bourgeoisie solves the basic democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution. In its effort to solve these democratic tasks the working class will have to implement measures that go beyond bourgeois structures, measures that are essentially socialist. In this attempt the working class will not go anywhere far without assistance from the developed countries. If the proletariat of the west does not take power, such assistance will not be forthcoming and the revolution will be doomed. The theory of permanent revolution is as applicable today as it was when Trotsky proposed it.

THE CYPRUS ECONOMY AND THE ORGANISATIONS OF THE WORKING CLASS.

How vulnerable the Cypriot economy is was demonstrated when the Gulf War produced ripples that terrified Cypriot capitalists. Payments stopped, massive layoffs without reaction from the unions became a daily event and reductions in salaries were accepted without a contest. An economy a fifth of which is directly related to tourism is exposed to the consequences of any turmoil in the area.

The consequences of this, however, are not always negative. The crisis in Lebanon generated an important transfer of international funds and services in Cyprus,



He didn't were glasses. Ziartides gave them to him lately in order to see that employers are progressive and Cypriot ones the most progressive of them all. (Cartoon by George Mavrogenis)

something that assisted the Cypriot economy considerably. At present, the crisis in the regions that constituted Yugoslavia has important positive consequences: on one hand the removal of the eastern coast of Adriatic from the competition helps the growth of tourism. On the other, despite official denials,

there seems to be some truth in press reports concerning the use of Cyprus by Yugoslav companies.

The Cyprus economy displayed impressive performance during the whole period since the declaration of Cypriot Independence. Its growth rates were considerably higher than the growth rates of the developed countries; inflation was kept at acceptably low rates. This growth raised the living standards of the Cypriots at levels comparable to those of Europe.

This was the basis on which industrial peace was built. In conditions in which living standards of the working people were continuously raised it was possible for the unions to adopt reformist policies. Discussions with the employers led to a bargain process in which the employers had the necessary margins for concessions and the working people were not forced to push things to a break point. Cypriot capitalism had not reach its limits, could still offer a better tomorrow to working people. Class struggle was not irreconcilable as yet, it could lead to a compromise, and this is what usually happened.

This was not always case. There have been times at which branches of the economy or production units had not been able to cope.

Chemical Industries, the clothing industry, Amiantos mine and hospitals are examples of explosions where conflict took a graver form. As long though as the general conditions are good, these kinds of explosions remain isolated and the success or failure of the workers depends on the peculiarities of each case and the degree to which the struggle is organized.

PEO has followed 'responsible' policies. As long as it has accepted that the capitalist system won't change, at least in the foreseeable future, the 'development of the economy' was its primary concern. The improvement of the life of the workers should be based on this. This classless approach ignores the fact that the 'economy' is in reality a bourgeois economy, that it recognizes the bourgeois' supremacy: it gives to workers what is left after profits. This can function smoothly as long as the economy is in a good state, but it collapses in periods when the economy destabilises. Without a revolutionary approach, the working class remains unprepared for the battles that follow and the unavoidable result is its defeat and retreat. The reformist policies of PEO had another consequence. The blurring of class lines gave SEK, in reality an employers' Union, the opportunity to gain prestige and strength in the working class. The more recent

generations of workers do not have the practical experience of what the difference between the two unions is. What they can see is a superiority of SEK in fighting slogans which are, of course, always restricted within the framework of capitalism. Today the challenge for PEO is especially great since its ideology is further undermined by the collapse of Stalinism and PEO doesn't seem to be in a position to adjust satisfactorily. Challenging capitalism will be even less part of PEO's policy, the unique position that this organisation holds in the consciousness of the working class will be undermined even faster.

DEOK doesn't seem to be in a position to challenge the dominance of the two big Unions in any serious way. Created with the sole purpose of playing the role of the Union arm of EDEK, it could not recruit beyond EDEK members. The truth is that the percentage of organised workers which belong to DEOK is significantly smaller than the electoral base of EDEK.

All these though do not point to a change in the balance of forces in favour of SEK. If the good state of the Cypriot economy is maintained the most probable perspective is a relaxation of the confrontation and a move towards closer cooperation and coordination among the Unions. It is doubtful though that

such a cooperation will stand in the face of the first serious class conflicts. The direction of rearrangements in such circumstances is impossible to predict and will depend largely on the course of events and attitudes of leaders. Whatever the course of events though, PEO will be the critical focus of developments. It is within PEO that important events will take place, it is within PEO that the working class will search for new ideas, new methods of action. The inability of the leadership to provide all these will mean that there will be important opportunities for serious intervention.

The state of the parties of the left is similar to that of the Unions. AKEL has been in a defensive situation for many years. Its electoral losses in the 1985 elections was not a passing incident, but reflected a deeper process of deterioration. The halt and partial reversal of the decline of AKEL is due to very specific factors and it is unlikely that it will continue for much longer. AKEL has exhausted the limits of its old role and doesn't seem able to find a new one.

The weakness of AKEL in the youth is intensely obvious. The youth cannot be won over on the basis of conformism and compromise with the status quo. The left had been able to attract the youth on the basis of

the vision of a new, better society. AKEL's long standing collaboration with right wing governments and compromised stance on every subject undermined the possibility to attract young people to the left. What still maintains the electoral basis of AKEL is the devotion of the older cadres and supporters of AKEL on the one hand and the opportunistic attachment of a large portion of petty bourgeois to the party, who can still benefit in a society that its government is forced to maintain good relations with AKEL on the other. A clear victory of DISY at presidential elections would have dramatic effects on the electoral basis of AKEL.

EDEK has not been able to play the role of a left substitute of AKEL. Its policy did was not aimed at this, it has never considered its self as a left alternative. This left free space to AKEL and deprived EDEK of the conditions for its growth. However, though EDEK is the second party of the left in the consciousness of the Cypriot people and despite its nationalistic policies, it still has the potential for a dramatic growth under certain conditions. But the most probable perspective is that it will destroy this potential as a result of the inadequacy of the leadership.

Lastly, ADISOK must be considered as having exhausted its course. Today it is nothing

more than a grouping of individuals who represent nothing more than themselves.

The Left Wing did not remain unaffected by the general retreat of the left. The last presidential election was its highest point of development and activity. This was followed by a period of decline which was partly natural reflecting the general decline in the political climate that followed the elections. The crisis in AKEL gave the opportunity for an important intervention of the Left Wing. Its participation in ADISOK may not have benefitted the Left Wing in the form of new recruits but the wide publicity given to the fight of the Left Wing against the right of ADISOK gave it new prestige and sympathy within the working class. The strict preservation of the independent existence of the Left Wing made possible the continuation and strengthening of its ties even with supporters of AKEL. The internal conflict, though, prevented the Left Wing from taking full advantage of the conflict and its exit from ADISOK. With the internal crisis brewing, the organization was forced to turn inward, abandoning to a large extent many of the potential benefits from the work and the battle in ADISOK.

After resolving the internal problems, the Left Wing should turninto political action again. The field of action should be the working class

in general and more specifically AKEL. It is questionable though whether entrist work there is feasible. We must examine methods of intervening and maintaining the independent status of the Left Wing at the same time. This is totally possible and provides a wide area of work, both from outside as well as from inside. We should also not dismiss EDEK, not as yet at least, and we must maintain the option of a turn towards EDEK.

THE CYPRUS PROBLEM AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.

One more round of talks was concluded in New York with no positive results. As expected, Denktash refused to accept Gali's ideas and map, resisted the pressure of the Security Council and forced USA and Britain to change their position. The UN is still impotent to impose anything as long as there is serious resistance.

Even more important is the fact that Denktash's attitude did not provoke any serious opposition in the Turkish Cypriot community. The two main opposition parties, CTP of Ozger Ozgur and TKP of Moustafa Akkinci, reacted in a very lukewarm way providing in essence cover to Denktash, while YKP of Alpay Durduran was forced to suspend its functioning

following an armed attack on its premises. In reality, the international pressure on Denktash, instead of achieving its goal, resulted in rallying the Turkish Cypriot Community around its leadership.

Denktash has no intention whatsoever to solve the Cyprus problem. To him as well as to the Turkish Cypriot ruling class any solution would mean the disappearance of the latter. The total impotency of the Turkish Cypriot bourgeoisie and its certain destruction in the case of free capitalist competition with the Greek Cypriot capitalists, leads it to refuse any solution that would bring the two communities together. Even two independent states could not have saved it. Economic realities would break the boundaries in a decade.

We should not underestimate the diplomatic success of Vasiliou though. Within the framework of bourgeois politics he has succeeded what was the goal of everyone until very recently. He succeeded in putting the Cyprus problem on the international agenda at a time that the crisis in the Balkans constitutes a very serious thread. He succeeded in making the subject an 'international' issue and in orienting pressure towards Turkey. He exposed Denktash and achieved the issuing by the Secretary General of the UN of a report

and a resolution by the Security Council that the Greek Cypriot politicians could not have succeeded even in their dreams. The success of Vasiliou is the maximum of the goals of both the 'concessionists' but also, however strange it may seem, the 'rejectionists' too.

The problem is that this is not enough. The solution of the Cyprus problem is not possible within the capitalist framework. Even if we assume that a solution is imposed, new conflicts will soon erupt. For this reason the building of links between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot working class is at this stage the main duty of the left. The fighting of nationalism is a basic prerequisite for the success of this policy.

The collaboration of DIKO-EDEK and the formation of the '*Fighting Forces Front*' tents to transform the presidential elections into a referendum on the Cyprus Problem. The internal problems of the *Front* and the difficulties in choosing a candidate are largely the result of lack of confidence in the possibilities of this cooperation which in its turn reduces these possibilities even further. With the result of the New York talks favouring Vasiliou, we should expect a new second round between Vasiliou and Clerides where Vasiliou will have the advantage of being the occupant of the Presidential position

and Clerides, for first time, won't carry the stigma of the military coup. This card was played at the previous presidential election for the last time. In this respect the outcome will be decided on a narrow margin.

The Left Wing has no real options in this Presidential election. It has to choose between the candidate of the bourgeoisie and two 'popular fronts'. With the candidate of the '*Fighting Forces Front*' focusing on nationalist agitation, Vasiliou is the only possible option. This option must be supported on the basis of a critical approach and patient analysis of the whole program of the Left Wing on the Cyprus Problem as well as on the struggle for Socialism.

November 1992, Nicosia.